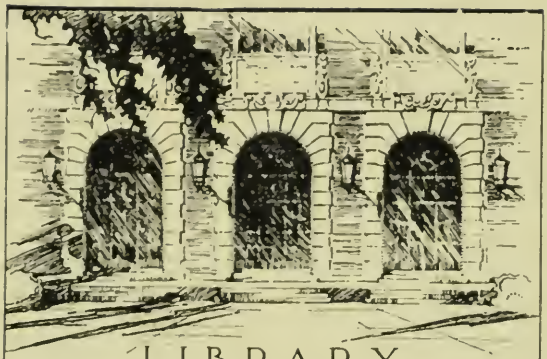
WOLFERN CHACE

A NOVEL

BY

ONE — WHO NOT UNKNOWN TO FAME,
YET DARES TO WRITE WITHOUT A NAME.



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WOLFERN CHACE:

A CHRONICLE OF

"Days that are No More."

A NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

One—who not unknown to fame,
Yet dares to write without a name.

Shadows! Oh, ye Shadows that before me pass;
We are all Shadows—Shadows on the grass.
I stand in the bright sunshine, upon this ancient lawn,
And muse in dreamy thought on the Shadows that are gone.

VOL. I.

London:
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5, Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.

1879.
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WOLFERN CHACE.

CHAPTER I.

"MALEDICTION on all chiming clocks and their inventor," said Sir Geoffrey Langdale to his lady-love, as they sat discussing a late breakfast at the Old Ship, Brighthelmstone.

"They are indeed a torture for all time," replied the lady, committing quite innocently an indifferent pun, "but they would scarcely have disturbed us, if those dissipated friends of yours, Sheridan and Moore, had not had such a noisy party in the room beneath us."

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"Nor if Mrs. Fitzherbert had not chanced to give her ball last night. Nor if those yelling fisherwomen had not given their bawls in the morning. Strange notions hotel-keepers have as to 'quiet bedrooms.' The next time I write for rooms, I'll bespeak the noisiest. I sometimes fancy the managers of these places have a kind of grim malice which tempts them to put all their visitors to the utmost possible discomfort."

Now, gentle reader, do not imagine from this little morning grumble, that my dear old friend, Geoffrey Langdale, was an irritable, highly nervous "gifted being," too sensitive to live pleasantly in this rough world of ours with its incessant kling, klang, klongs. A more opposite character could scarcely be conceived. A stalwart, broad-built knight, who in olden time would have borne his armour lightly, and wielded sword and lance

right manfully; rich dark brown hair, parting in graceful waves from a bold clear brow; a well-bronzed face, handsome rather from its noble, manly expression than from any perfection of feature; sparkling merry blue eyes that joined heartily in the sunny smile, lighted up the face with an irrepressible geniality, even while indulging in the Englishman's birthright of a grumble. Such was the outer man, and for the light within that took this pleasant form, it shone from the depths of as kind and generous a nature as ever man was endowed withal. 'Twas this, and not any special cleverness, that had in a few years won him a high position in the Treasury, the kindly regard of his chief, and the consequent knighthood from his Sovereign, and finally enabled him to carry off from a host of rivals the high-born and graceful lady who was now his wife, a wife of whom

any man might well be proud. Tall and statuesque in figure and feature, yet with an eloquent grace of movement that took off all sense of undue height, and with loving eyes of bright and tender hazel that converted the statue into a perfect gentlewoman.

Our two friends had posted down to the sea on the day before, bringing with them their young daughters, Caroline and Mildred, and their boyish son and heir, Gilbert.

The Prince Regent's chariot had dashed past them on the road, carrying down the future King of England to his pet toy, the Pavilion, as fast as four thoroughbreds could travel. His Royal Highness had recognised the Langdale's travelling carriage, and graciously accorded one of his superb bows (rather spoilt by the speed of his horses) to Lady Langdale as he passed, and this morning an

invitation to a *petit diner* at the Pavilion had followed the recognition.

Brighthelmstone (before the caddish curtness of modern slang had clipped it down to two syllables) was a pleasanter little seaside town than any we have in these days. Its princely patron, despite his many faults, with which the saturnine Jeremiah of Chelsea and the satirical showman of Vanity Fair have made the world sufficiently acquainted, certainly created for a time one of the most charming combinations of sea air, gaiety and society that could well be desired or enjoyed. Beneath his fantastic pepper-castors were gathered all the wit, some of the wisdom, and even a little of the poetry of the age. Sheridan, with his carefully prepared impromptus; Fox, with his genial eloquence and deep knowledge of human nature; Byron and Moore, with their diverse utterances.

Here, too, was the caustic Wilkes, with his ugly face, which half-an-hour's converse completely talked away; Mansfield, with his handsome silence, and the immortal Beau Brummell, with his amusing egotisms—the grand antitype of the Lord Dundreary of our age.

How fresh and piquant, then, were all the sayings and doings of this curious Court Jester! The catarrh which he caught from being "put by his man into a room with a damp stranger," the sublime contempt for vegetables, expressed in his confession that he "had once eaten a pea," the hundred and one anecdotes which have unhappily passed into household words, were then as eagerly looked for, and as heartily relished as our weekly "Punch."

Poor Brummell! 'Twas a bad day for him when he won his bet that he would make the Prince ring the bell. "Order Mr. Brummell's

carriage" was his death-warrant; for a court jester without a Court to jest in is indeed a dead thing.

Outside the inner circle of the *crême de la crême* might be seen Tom, Jerry and Logic looking rather penitent in the morning from the effect of a deep drinking match over night; dashing Dragoons and dandy Lancers, with their spurs and swords clanking martially as they cantered up and down; Tom Cribb, with a big stick and a bull dog, and now and then a well preserved specimen of Dr. Pangloss, LL.D., A.S.S., etc., etc., walking arm-in-arm with a tottering old beau of George the Second's time, still clinging to the quaint but graceful costume of his young days, with its old broidery and peach coloured velvet.

But here comes Sir Geoffrey Langdale, and as he shakes hands with us, His Royal High-

ness, muffled in sables, drives past, and on the second turn stays his carriage to interchange a few gracious words with our friends. We mark, with some interest, the slight flush that passes over the lady's face as the Prince mentions one or two names of those whom they are to meet in the evening, and it is also a pleasant study to see the fine combination of courteous deference and perfect manliness with which Sir Geoffrey interchanges a few sentences with His Royal Highness. We are young and foolish, and sulkily keep aloof from the Prince's Court (possibly not caring for the grapes for the old reason); however we either are, or pretend to be, quite content to take our knowledge at second hand from our old friend. So the next morning we meet again, and hear all about the *petit diner*.

But fear not, dear reader. Have not such things been so well and so minutely described

in ——'s Collections, xxx's Memoirs and the Lord-knows-who's Biography, that we may, and must in mercy spare you any description of dinners that were eaten and disagreed with people so very long ago, although the recital amused us young folks well enough then. But you have had enough of Brighthelmstone, and we only took you down there for a breath of the refreshing sea air, and as a pleasant means of introducing you to the Langdales. So now you must positively come down and dine and stay a few days with them at their country seat in the heart of the great forest of Waltham. 'Tis open house always, and I have only to write and say, "I'm coming down such and such a day, and will take leave to bring So-and-so," and an answer returns, as fast as answer can, "Come! delighted to see you, and glad to make the acquaintance of your friend!"

Now, you must know I don't abuse the privilege which I prize as one of the few pleasures of my life, but if you will go with me, dear reader, I think you will be sure to like my friends, and I hope it will end by their being your friends also for the remainder of your life. As we drive down I will explain to you how they chanced upon this out-of-the-way place.

Well, many years ago, when Sir Geoffrey was getting somewhat weary of the diurnal ride in Rotten Row, he ordered his horse earlier than usual, and rode out with a vague idea of calling on an old hunting chum of his in Waltham Forest. It was a lovely spring morning, he had a grand Arab horse under him, and forgetting all about his chum, he rode on and on, deeper and deeper into the forest, until he lost himself amidst its glades. He was

not in much fear of enacting one of the Babes in the Wood, but however lovely the morning and however sweet the air, a man, after a long ride, is apt to feel hungry.

The baying of a house-dog made his horse prick up his ears, and Sir Geoffrey, turning in the direction of the sound, saw a little column of blue wood smoke rising out of what seemed a dense thicket. When there is smoke there is generally fire, and where fire, food; so threading his way down a narrow bridle path, he at length came to a farm gate, and unlatching it with his hunting-crop, rode into the lane beyond. This lane had evidently been a made-road, but from long disuse was now completely covered by a soft mossy sward; a row of splendid trees on either side formed a charming avenue, in the far vista of which he now perceived a quaint old-fashioned country house. Riding

on, he entered a spacious fore-court, with an open crescent of thickly planted firs, interspersed with evergreens of such great size as to form a leafy wall, so dense and high that not a glimpse of anything beyond could be obtained in any direction.

Turning his attention to the house, he perceived it to be of great size and age, with an air of repose about it as if it had been lulled to sleep a hundred years ago by the whispering of the leaves and the soft warmth of the sun. The quiet hush of the whole place was simply delicious, and it was a long time (hungry as he was) before he could find the heart to break its dream by pulling at the great bell handle, and rousing to unwonted sound a loud, far-clanging bell. The house was empty, but at the sound, a scared woman came from a pathway which led off at one wing, with a huge bunch of keys in her hand,

and seeing a mounted stranger, ran back again, calling out, "Joe," "Father."

In answer to her call, "Father" came into view, hobbling along with that peculiar jerky lift of the leg which the constant use of the spade gives to old gardeners. He was a little thin, wizened old man, who looked as if he had not had a good full meal in the whole unblessed course of a very long life, and his face was drawn up into a perpetual pucker that might, at first sight, have been taken for a grin, but upon closer inspection it gave one a strong impression that he had never had much to grin about in this world. Time (the still older gardener) had dug Lilliputian trenches at the corners of his eyes and mouth, and these were so well filled up with a dark fertile soil, that it would have hardly surprised you to see fine lawn-grass or mustard and cress growing in them. The old

man came forward to the end of the path, shaded his eyes with his hand, and then he, too, vanished, without speaking to the stranger, and joined the woman in shouting for "Joe."

At last the much desired "Joe" came up, and happily proved to be a brisk well-witted fellow, whose senses had not by any means gone to sleep, even in this sleepy hollow. Hence the doors were unlocked and the shutters thrown open, whilst with a pleased interest, Sir Geoffrey passed slowly on from room to room of the rambling old house, Joe's tongue rambling on meantime with a running accompaniment of "who had lived here, and what had been done by so-and-so, or at such a time." With a keen eye to the main chance, Joe saw in the stranger a future possible master; so that worthy assisted his wife to prepare a rude but welcome meal of bread and butter, and eggs and bacon. This,

when accompanied by some choice brandy from his flask, cooled by icy water from the deep well, fortified our friend for his ride back to town. Joe piloted him out to an opposite avenue from the one he had entered, which opened on to a country lane, and this in turn wound its undulating length between blossoming hawthorn hedges, and finally merged in the high road to the great Babylon.

In a few weeks after this chance visit, Sir Geoffrey had, with his usual decision of action, purchased the old house, with all its belongings. It was a singularly home-like place, and the charm of it seemed to extend to all their visitors. Amply spacious for a large establishment and many guests, there was yet nothing pretentious about it. It seemed simply to have grown where it stood, like the trees that surrounded it; although free from all bizarre or fantastic decoration, there were

clear indications of an artist's eye and an artist's fine taste having been skilfully at work in the flowing lines of the garden and the grouping of shrubs, trees and avenues leading to the various points of view. Some of the paths had been left uncleared for so many years, that they were entirely overgrown and hidden by the lavish growth of branches, weeds and brambles, and it was only by degrees that these were discovered and gradually cleared. Sir Geoffrey undertook some of this woodman's work himself, finding in the use of the axe that most excellent of all antidotes to overwork of mind.

The disturbed state of Europe had of late put a heavy strain on all connected with the Government; indeed, but for the occasional respite which he enjoyed here, it would have gone hard with our friend; for war has many

victims other than those who fall on the battle field. Night after night he had sacrificed his much needed repose to aid his chief and to encourage his subordinate. He made no pretensions to great genius, but in that firm and yet cheerful fulfilment of duty, that steady and unboasting devotion to "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," which is one of the finest traits of our countrymen, he had few equals and no superior. Hence, like all willing horses, he had all the "trace work," and both head and shoulders had begun to ache with the incessant pull. Great was his refreshment at being able to sally forth after breakfast, armed with well balanced axe and well sharpened bill, to spend his mornings in the sweet fresh air perfumed only by woodland odours and wild flowers.

These and similar health-restoring labours Sir Geoffrey entered into with all the thorough-

going zest of a genial nature, and whether in the winter woods or the summer hayfields he was ever a stalwart and cheery "doer and enjoyer of all things." In his happy disposition both wife and children shared largely. It was a pleasant thing to see how the highly-bred and hitherto somewhat delicate Lady Langdale accepted with fine grace and tact the duties of her new form of life. The only daughter of a noble *emigré*, her French versatility made her equally at home as the centre of attraction of a Prince's Court and the centre of action in an English country home, and hence it was not much to be wondered at that many members of the Prince's Court, and *sub rosa*, not infrequently the Prince himself, were visitors at Wolfern Chace. The Regent's brothers were still more often down there without attempting or wishing to attempt any muffled conceal-

ment. Fine, frank, manly fellows, whatever their other shortcomings, they were always straightforward, out-speaking Englishmen, with little of that jealous petty leaven of pride and exclusiveness which is the sole safeguard of lesser people. Sir Geoffrey and Lady Langdale did not court or particularly enjoy these visits, for, however much they had been used to such society, it was rather to escape from the inevitable restraint of entertaining people of so much higher rank than themselves that they had left London; but he, lavishly hospitable by nature, could not of course make any demur when young Fallington, after a few weeks shooting at the Chace, said he really must persuade His Royal Highness to come down. Equally, of course, he felt bound to entertain the Prince right royally, and an outdoors *fête*, to be followed by a banquet and a ball, was

organised on a grand scale for the occasion of the first visit. First the upholsterers besieged the house and took room after room by storm—clearing out vast van loads of the old-world furniture, to make room for the new. Then the gardeners were let loose through the grounds to put everything in almost painful order; a few choice marble statues and vases were permitted to peep out from the dark leafery; a partial clearance in the crescented surroundings of the fore-court opened up to the front windows of the house a charming view of the fields, lake, hills and woods in the distance. Fountains sprung up here and there in quite unexpected places, and when the bright morning came for which all this was the prelude, snowy tents, gay flags, and a profusion of flowers gave brightness to the scene. Meantime, all the avenues were festooned with little glass lamps, skil-

fully adjusted in harmonious gradations of colour, ready for the evening *fête*.

Scarcely were these preparations complete, when carriages began to arrive thickly and fast, and I will attempt to sketch the occupants as they pass in. First, then, arrived Dr. Maxwell, the lineal and last descendant of a nobleman who was attainted of high treason in the stern Tudor age; a small, well-preserved, courtly old gentleman, with just a suggestion of Dr. Pangloss about him, partly perhaps from the marvellous glossiness of his coat and the superlative whiteness of his frilled front. But a fine-charactered old fellow with a cultivated taste for the *Belles lettres*, of irreproachable manners, and withal gifted with a considerable acuteness in criticism. He had had his thorn in the flesh in the shape of a Xantippe, but had borne it with exemplary patience, only equalled by the

beautiful resignation with which he had since borne his bereavement.

Next came Colonel Falconer and his son Pierce; the former a fierce old Indian officer, of a somewhat restless and impatient temper, hot as the suns he had endured, and the curries he had eaten; the latter a fine handsome and intelligent young fellow—a complete Crichton in all manly exercises and games, and yet as tender-hearted as a girl, and as frank and unassuming as a child.

Next came an arrival from the then fashionable quarter of Bedford Square. Sir George and Lady Blandville. He, a splendidly got-up specimen of an old-young man with nearly everything false about him except his heart and his diamonds; strikingly handsome, and of an unmistakably aristocratic appearance, he lacked nothing but Nature to be a really noble man. Learned

in the Law and a Fellow of half-a-dozen ological societies he had a fund of information at his command, but unfortunately conveyed it in so pompous a manner, and so artificial a tone of voice, that the most exemplary listener did not care to spend a second long morning with him.

The lady has still more artificiality and considerably less heart, which deficiency, however, she somewhat oddly endeavours to conceal under an assumption of an immense amount of gushing sentiment. But you know the old proverb, "Scratch a Russ, and you find a Tartar," and a very slight scratch would have found one in Lady Blandville. Perhaps Sir George had already done so; he was certainly meeker as a married man than he was as a bachelor.

Next arrived, from his old family city house in Broad Street, Sir Geoffrey's elder

brother, the portly, delightfully-genial William Langdale and his clever wife—a strangely, and yet happily matched couple. He, a large-built John Bull, with a massive broad brow that few men cared to provoke into a frown; a powerful but flexible mouth, capable of rapid changes of expression, but ever readiest for a laugh—a laugh, the mere tone and heartiness of which used often to set the table in a roar, even before the humour or wit had been thoroughly appreciated. Of wit and humour there was such an inexhaustible fund in his nature, that it could hardly help showing itself in his most serious transactions. A London merchant, with well-earned wealth—it was a tradition of his house that its hospitality was only bounded by the size of the dining tables and the number of its bedrooms. This tradition was gracefully carried out by Mrs. Langdale.

She, with her bright and gay disposition, won all his friends' hearts, as well as his, in the first year of their marriage, and ruled him, and his, and almost every one else who came under the spell of her presence, with a hand at once so delicate and light, yet so firm and absolute, that, as far as Langdale was concerned, he gloried in his subjection. Some of the wilder and more unscrupulous of the hangers-on at Langdale House, who had got into a habit of looking upon it as a kind of private hotel, were quickly relegated to their proper places by the young mistress, William, meantime, enjoying immensely the courteous irony with which his wife dismissed a fop or rebuked an impertinent.

Whilst these were arriving by the park road, clusters of villagers were crossing the fields in all directions from the three adjacent hamlets, and gradually forming into groups

in the broad hay-field opposite the chief windows of the house, for Sir Geoffrey was one of those who "whilst he feasted all the great, yet ne'er forgot the small," and hence a holiday to his own people and to all the neighbourhood had been arranged, with all the needful accessories of beef and beer.

Great was the wonderment and admiration of these country folk when the Prince's outriders came up the park slopes at a hand gallop, quickly followed by the four-horse open barouche, with its distinguished occupant, looking every inch a Prince. Thicker and faster followed his suite and the country families; the carriages forming for some time an almost unbroken line from the lodge gates to the porch.

A sumptuous luncheon in the house was fairly well enjoyed, thanks to the morning drive through the fresh air, but what would

Prince and Peer have given for the well-nigh incredible appetite of Hodge over his plain meat and pudding! *Pâté de foie gras plus* dyspepsia is a bad exchange for beef *à la sauce de faim.*

After both the outward and inward "man" had been thus feasted in their several ways, the lads from the village were incited to the old English sports of bell in the ring, jumping in sacks, wheeling barrows blindfold, and other rough-and-ready games, whilst the women and girls romped in the hay, or swung in the swings, and the patriarchs sat talking under the old trees, of old days in the old, old way, or toddled about hand-in-hand with some little pet rosy grandchild, thus all unconsciously linking the past with the future.

The stately Prince sat in his favourite attitude upon a magnificent sofa, which had been placed under a canopy on the lawn

fronting the field, and conversed graciously with such of the guests as Sir Geoffrey or Lady Langdale thought well to present to him. He even several times condescended to "smile audibly" at some of the more comic of the clownish games, as when, for example, in a roped ring an agile fellow with a bell evaded, by a thousand hairbreadth escapes, the outstretched arms of a dozen masked and blinded pursuers. The masks had been effectively chosen with the most absurdly melancholy expressions, and the rigid stolidity of these mock faces contrasting with the intense buffoonery of the game, produced an irresistibly droll effect. Sometimes four or five of these masquers, deluded by the bell-ringer, fancied they were upon the point of catching him, and rushed spasmodically into each other's arms instead, with a quadruple embrace, hurling thus together in such wild

rout and confusion as ended in a general roll over.

William Langdale was in his element amongst the rustics, and with his dry humour and quaint jests, won all their hearts, from the old grandsires, with whom he talked of the state of the crops and the price of potatoes, down to the little rosy chubby children, whose astonished young eyes went as round as the bright shillings which he scattered amongst them. The young men and lads had to win their shillings by open competition in grotesquery, such as dipping their faces into basins of treacle, and powdering one another with meal-bags, racing in pairs with their legs tied, and other rough games.

Meantime foot races on the flat and over hurdles were arranged by Sir Geoffrey and Pierce, who mounted their horses, and ac-

companied the runners over the leaps. A pretty sight it was to see the horsemen threading their way skilfully through the crowds, keeping all in decorous order, and promoting good humour and fair play. Sir Geoffrey was proud and fond of his horses, and had mounted Pierce on a splendid filly, only just broken, whose perfect shape and graceful springing bounds attracted general attention to the horseman. Pierce had broken her himself, and sat her as if the two were one. Like a young fellow, he could not resist showing her paces and her jumping powers to the best advantage, until even the Prince was struck by the beauty of the filly and the skill of her rider, and condescended to send word to Pierce that he should like to see her at some trial leap. Only too pleased, Pierce bade some hedgers fasten two of the wattled hurdles on the top of two others so as to

make an impromptu fence of double height; then giving the filly a sweeping gallop round the field to warm her to her work, brought her skilfully to the jump, and took her over without touch of whip or spur. The beautiful creature, with her arching neck and swelling nostrils, seeming afterwards as proud of her achievement as her young rider himself. He then leapt her gently over the ha ha fence on to the lawn to receive the caresses of the ladies, some of which he, doubtless, envied her. Returning to the field, he dismounted to adjust a girth, and as he was remounting, somewhat carelessly, some lads running past startled the filly, who, by a sudden swerve, flung him down to the ground, with one foot caught in the stirrup, and then plunged backward in mad affright, dragging with her the helpless and apparently doomed man.

"Keep back! keep back!" shouted Sir

Geoffrey to the men who, with more zeal than discretion, were rushing towards the filly. "If she once turns her heels to him, he's a dead man."

It was a few seconds of awful suspense, but, happily, Pierce had accustomed his favourite to obey his voice as well as rein, and now speaking to her in well-known and soothing tones, the snorting terrified creature paused for an instant, and gazed wildly at the prostrate man. In that instant Pierce curved himself up from the ground, seized the stirrup leather in both his hands, and flung himself into the saddle.

With the deep-drawn breath of a man rescued as by a miracle from an awful death, he bent low in unspeakable thankfulness to God for the life thus saved. This little incident threw a slight cloud over the gaiety of the day, especially as Caroline Langdale

had fainted at the scene. But she was soon herself again, and I noticed a slight flush when her eyes met Pierce's eager glance, and a still deeper one when her hand touched his with its silent congratulation at his escape.

Many of the guests had wandered away through the deliciously shaded walks and avenues, some had been boating on the lake, others amusing themselves with archery, but now the great gong drew all together as the evening shades began to fall, and after a few manly words of kindly farewell from Sir Geoffrey to his humbler friends, calling forth a cheer that rang far and wide through the forest, and out faintly and more faintly to the far lying hamlets, the villagers dispersed to their homes. The Prince retired to his apartments to dress for dinner, and the chosen guests again met at the grand banquet, where Satiety once more sought for its "languid

appetite" in an infinite variety of viands and wines. 'Twas rather a dull and tedious affair, for the presence of a very exalted personage, unless he has the supreme gift of putting all the world at its ease, is decidedly a restraint. Very high rank must either give a very high zest to society, or it must dull and oppress it; it cannot expect to enjoy the happy medium of us lesser folk. However, it came to an end, as even the dullest dinner must, and Lady Langdale rose with a well-concealed sigh of relief to pass through with her lady friends into the drawing-room, and be free for a time from the magnificent and ponderous gallantry of her illustrious right-hand guest. The men (as was the custom in those bad old days) stayed long and drank deeply, but as Sheridan and Moore were of the party to whom wine seemed like the needful fuel to the fire of

their wit, the mere drinking was redeemed from its unmitigated sottishness by many a sparkling epigram and gay song,

Sir Geoffrey, changing his place at the table, strove his best to entertain the Prince, and being so well aided, succeeded in dispelling the dulness of dignity. Sir Geoffrey had that valuable quality of mind which not originating much of itself, is yet the source of originality and wit in others. Those who surrounded him were ever sure of his keen appreciation of their efforts to amuse, without which, wit burns dimly as in a fog, and the raciest humour gradually dulls down into a sulky silence. His power was like that of a concave mirror, which receives, concentrates and reflects the rays that come within its circle, and it is worth while to observe how many sparkling and transient rays are lost to the world, for the lack of some such genial

reflectors. Even the Prince gradually felt the brightening influence, for, to retain the metaphor, the host used his best skill this evening to throw the reflected light fully on His Royal Highness.

The ball and concert which had been arranged to follow the banquet, happily prevented the gentlemen from sitting to a dangerous length at the dinner table. Sir Geoffrey had engaged the celebrated violinist Viotti, and the still more celebrated vocalist, Mademoiselle Catalani, as the stars of the concert, but the younger men were of course led away from the table rather by the music of the dance, for which two choice and well selected bands had been engaged; one for the ball-room, and one for the bolder fays and fairies who preferred to trip it on the outer lawns.

The Prince of course opened the ball with

Lady Langdale in a few courtly measures, and in the course of the evening honoured some two or three other ladies by his hand, but for the most part relapsed into his favourite attitude on his ever sacred and immortal sofa. Thus Magnificence assumed its pedestal; Maturity flourished jewelled snuffboxes, and talked politics; Maternities kept watch over promising flirtations, and Flirtation was the presiding goddess of the hour.

The Hon. Mr. Fallington was in a seventh heaven, for with Flirtation as goddess, he was assuredly high priest. Fallington of the Guards, was one of the Prince's *aides-de-camp;* a fop every inch of him, from spur to plume (as our Laureate says) but not the hybrid, half-idiotic, half-cunning fop of the present age. Weak-minded, and soft-hearted assuredly, but not quite a drivelling booby, incapable of stuttering forth half-a-dozen

consecutive words, and therefore compelled to take refuge in pseudo-aristocratic silence, broken only by blunt monosyllabic insolence. This creation, or rather caricature of the "latter-day fop" owes its temporary vitality to the combined genius of Mr. Sothern, and the late Mr. Robertson, who between them have deluded well-nigh half the young shopmen of London into the idea that it is aristocratic to be as purblind as a nine-days kitten, as deaf and inattentive as an omnibus conductor, and as surly and gloomy as an old pikeman. Poor young shams, they little dream of the intense fun made of them by those whom they imagine they are imitating.

But pardon this digression. We have slidden down the years, from Mr. Fallington to Lord Dundreary. Ah, well! "*Facilis decensus averni*" must plead the excuse of an old gossiping chronicler.

Droll fellow, Fallington! quite a character! dressed? ah, Dress after all was his first divinity. Flirtation only his second. Always up to the highest verge of the fashion, and sometimes a little beyond it. 'Twas a study with him, and at one time of his life, that life would have become irrevocably extinct, if his man had suffered him to appear in an ill-fitting coat, or a carelessly tied cravat; still I must do him the justice to admit that when once he was well-dressed, and knew it, he forgot all about it. Yes, when once he had been properly attired by the Graces (the said Graces being his tailor, his laundress and his valet), he then devoted himself wholly and unreservedly to either Mars or Venus. He was not wholly a feather-bed soldier either, for 'twas of him his Colonel used to tell with much amusement that when Fallington was serving as a cornet in his first battle, a

cannon ball killed a rank and file man near where they were sitting on their horses and spattered them with the poor fellow's blood. The Colonel turned round with a—

"Well, my boy, what do you think of that?"

"Ah," replied the other with a drawing-room lisp, "ith very nathty; I wish we could have thome water to wash our handth."

This was either a real or constrained coolness under fire, that raised him much in his Colonel's estimation.

His devotion to Venus was less cool, and more easy, and being handsome, well-born, and lavishly extravagant, he had already won for himself the proud reputation of a lady-killer—but he was fickle as fond, and courted notoriety even more eagerly than beauty. If any woman of any class reached a high zenith in popular notice or opinion, Fallington was her devoted

slave during her little day of dazzle, and basked exultantly in the borrowed light, or despaired if left in the shadow. He was a kind of star-hunter or a natural-born satellite, and, of course, this same trait characterised his estimation of men also. He delighted in being attached to the Prince, because he was thus an integral part of the "observed of all observers," and he looked upon him as a temporary demi-god, and believed he had conferred an immense favour on Sir Geoffrey by bringing His Royal Highness to Wolfern Chace, little dreaming that Sir Geoffrey, in his heart of hearts, wished him and His Royal Highness at the Antipodes throughout the whole affair. He often confessed to me in our after-dinner chats, that if he had been placed under the influence of a Warren Hastings, a Washington, a Nelson, or especially of a Napoleon, he should have

worshipped them with the blind adoration of a Hindoo. I inferred, therefore, that the fellow had a heart, and by no means a bad one, but he lacked head to control it. At that time this quivering magnetic needle was attracted by Caroline Langdale, and followed her about with a most provoking pertinacity. Hence it was not surprising that he, and not Pierce, had so manœuvred as to secure that young beauty for the greater number of dances. Pierce, indeed, with that sensitive reserve, half-chivalry, half-pride that attends on most noble natures, held himself scrupulously aloof from the smallest suspicion of presumptuous intrusion on the notice or attention of Miss Langdale—but none the less it made the blood rush to his temples with a fevered heat to see the dangling dandies of the Prince's Court taking, what he in his simplicity, deemed impertinent liberties with

this young goddess. Many and many a bitter time had come over him of late, when fervent love, passion, hate, jealousy, and scrupulous honour, each in turn, contended for the mastery of the man, tore him, like demons, in their wild conflict. But happily the last ever prevailed, and by that beautiful instinct in young hearts whereby nobleness is ever drawn to nobleness, his very conquest of himself, and consequent reticence, were precisely what first attracted Caroline to him. But "On with the dance, let joy be unconfined—no rest till morn, when youth and pleasure meet, to chase the glowing hours with flying feet." Thus went matters at Wolfern Chace that night, whilst in the intervals of the dance, dainty sounds of exquisite music came floating out of the opened window into the sweet summer night air from Catalani's voice or Viotti's violin.

Meantime, in an outer theatre, preparations were being finally made for another surprise for the Prince. Sheridan had been down some days before organising a picked company of amateurs for the performance of one or two scenes from his recently finished play—"the Rivals," and as he himself took "Sir Lucius;" Colonel Falconer, "Sir Anthony Absolute;" Fallington, "Captain Absolute;" Tom Moore, "Bob Acres;" and the minor parts were also well supported, the affair was a great success. Mrs. Langdale made an admirable "Mrs. Malaprop," with an irresistible derangement of epitaphs, and Caroline and Mildred looked charmingly as "Lydia" and "Julia." Pierce had purposely kept aloof from any part in this; he dared not trust himself to play the lover to Caroline, and felt an intolerable distaste for any other character. He was wise enough, however, to avoid the tor-

ture of seeing another man take that part, and whilst the play was being enacted, wandered alone through the grounds, finding bitter comments upon his darkened hopes in the clouds that began to gather in the sky, and the waning light of the lamps, as they flickered towards extinction.

"Thus is my life over-clouded," he exclaimed, "and thus are my hopes lighted only to be extinguished. If my father had been less proud and scrupulous, less blunt and hasty in temper, he might easily have obtained for us wealth and position. If he had not in a fit of anger and disgust thrown up his own commission and forbidden me all attempt to fight my own way to fortune in India, I might have won it for myself. If;—a thousand devils take these 'ifs'—what a fool am I to stay mourning and moaning here, bewailing my hard fate and crying like

a silly child for a hidden moon. Is there no other career in life than that of cutting throats? Aye, plenty—in which a man can far more nobly risk life, health, energy, and put body and mind to a full manly strain, and win or die in the race! But hist! which of them am I fit for? A soldier—the son and grandson of soldiers—the red blood runs in my veins and fires my brain. With little training, save that of the camp and the drawing-room—a gentleman—most painfully, 'a gentleman'—that is a man without any ostensible means of living. This is a bad starting-point for any race—but start I will—I must! To loiter here is utter folly, and will end in madness. Ah! see how Nature speaks to man in all his moods! There's a rift in the black cloud, and a bright star looks straight into my eyes—my life, too, saved to-day by a merciful Providence—

saved! Aye—for what? Surely not to be wasted in genteel idleness and useless regrets. This shall not be—better a score of failures than no attempt."

Such was the ending of this eventful day. Feasted and *fêted* magnificence was whirled back to its palace—wearied old gentlemen dispersed to their homes grumbling at the length of the drive—disappointed mothers scolded—and pleased ones praised, their daughters. Flirtation closed her temple and dismissed her votaries, and Pierce Falconer awoke to action, and resolved to be —a man.

CHAPTER II.

HOW droll it seems that the whole of the incidents in commonplace lives, events of the most vital importance to the poor players in the game of life, can all be narrated in the course of a morning chat.

As with people so with books, a work that has probably cost the author years of deep thought and hard study, is read by even a careful reader in a few hours. What a wonderful, what a splendid power of mind this indicates, and what a happiness it is that men possess such a power. Imagine yourself, dear reader, instead of being partly beguiled by this gossiping chronicle, compelled to

follow absolutely, and in the flesh as well as in the spirit, the varied fortunes of a middle class family in order to find out what they did, said, and thought, and what ultimately became of each and all. Why, a man would have to be literally, as well as metaphorically a "man beside himself" to attain even such poor scraps of knowledge. But where Knowledge fails, there comes to us old grey-headed Memory, with his calm, placid, thoughtful wife Reflection, his bright-eyed daughter Wit, and his laughter-loving son Humour, and you and I draw our chairs round the winter fires or lounge under the shades of the summer trees, and tell each other what we have seen and known of the little dramas of life.

Amongst the many visitors at Wolfern Chace was Dr. Noulaiton, a French *emigré*, a great friend of Lady Langdale, and a favourite

with every one, a man of wide and brilliant knowledge, a capital talker, with an English accent so perfect that but for the slight intonation of the Gaul, he might have passed for a veritable John Bull. A large, corpulent man of the Louis le Gros build, although very, very much less "gros" than that inconveniently fat monarch—a face and head also considerably of the Bourbon type, but intellectualized. A high and capacious forehead, apparently sloping back, but only seeming so by reason of the prominent brow; bright eyes that scintillated with fun and hearty enjoyment, not only at his own wit and humour, but at that of others as well (a pleasant trait of character, and none the less so for its rarity). Laughter with him was a necessity of his existence; whatever his troubles and pains, and he had many, whatever baulks and hindrances he met with in his career, and he

had many of those also, I do not think that dear old Doctor ever let a day pass by without getting one hearty laugh out of it, and I must do his memory the justice to say that he was infinitely more ready to laugh at himself and his own misfortunes than at those of others. With all this he was no mere Merry Andrew yielding to causeless, inane cachinations, his mirth had perfect sense in it, and he could always give a reason for the fun that was in him.

Now it was to this man of all others that poor Pierce confided his new-born aspirations to do something better with his life than merely dangle it for three-score years and ten, or any other shorter term that the thread would hold. Dr. Noulaiton was a man of science, and by his counsel Pierce threw the whole energies of his mind into the study of chemistry. Chemistry was then in its in-

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fancy. Priestly, Lavoisier, and some few of the subtler minds of the age had just turned the light of their bright intellects upon this study, and revealed possibilities of fame and wealth in it that were especially captivating to an eager, versatile, sanguine man like Noulaiton. The Doctor at once inspired the young disciple with his own passion for some glorious discovery that should send the world along into a more brilliant future, and bring renown to the discoverers.

With more seriousness, however, than was his wont, he warned his young friend of the hard study, the enormous and unfailing patience, the sleuth-hound tenacity requisite for this pursuit, nor did he fail to point out the necessity for incessant practice in delicacy of touch, the keen strain on all the senses, and the courage requisite to bear up against those cruel disappointments when the cup of

success is just raised to the lips of the parched aspirant, and then dashed down by some mere hair-breadth failure. Noulaiton was no mere charlatan, no vague random questioner of Nature, dancing about over the whole field of science for the chance of finding a stray diamond in some recently turned-up furrow; gay and elastic as his nature was, he had the acuteness to foresee that concentration of intellect is the first element of success, and that the sanguine hap-hazard wanderer who follows every glimmering will o' the wisp in turn, is soon left plunging about in the slough of despond. The master knew it—the pupil practised it—a dogged tenacity, a quiet patience, an unfailing elasticity and courage under disappointments were Pierce's strong points. Yet the half successes, the incessantly ruined hopes, the constant fracture of the Venetian goblet

when just filled with fortune's wine, were harder for Pierce than for Noulaiton, because the one was playing for the higher stake Love, and the other, for the lower one Renown. After some of the severer trials of this kind, therefore, Pierce was sometimes impelled to seek a temporary change of thought and action by short rushes out into the open air of London life in all its motley aspects, but both his purse and his inclination led him to study character chiefly where it showed itself in perfect unrestraint in the Toad-in-a-hole wine cellars and quaint old taverns of that day. He touched lightly, and with fairly pure hands, many kinds of social pitch, and happily with very slight defilement. Love is the potent counter-spell to all low vices, and except with weak or depraved natures, even a young man may run the gauntlet of many temptations if his head be guarded by the

helmet of an honourable love, and his heart by the corslet of a noble constancy ; nor did he find the so-called pitch so desperate in its defiling power as some would have us think. Seeking ever for the brighter side, even in the darkest natures, his search was often rewarded by an unexpected gleam of rough-and-ready virtue which showed how truly "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

Amongst other sources of relief from his severer studies he joined a debating club, held by a few young fellows, whose pockets were as low as their aspirations were high, and who strove to lift themselves out of the depths of mere smoke and beer into a clearer intellectual atmosphere. Some of their speeches were taken down by one of the members in shorthand, and I have Pierce's in my pocket-book. It is, I think, worth read-

ing, as affording a better insight into his character and tone of thought at that time than any I could give by mere description.

But first figure to yourself a somewhat dingily-grand, darkly-furnished room in the tavern, with a few dubious pictures, in heavy gold frames, and a venerable mirror on its walls, a sulky big fire in the huge grate, and an equally sulky central oil-lamp on the table. Around the table sat some score of men, many of whom have since made their mark in the world. Ronan, the tall quaint metaphysician, with hard unpleasant stammering utterance, whose words came out like the blows of a sledge-hammer; his stern pitiless, cast-iron logic speedily smashed up any little delicate filigree sophisms that came in its way. Then the stout and short Avenel, glowing quickly into genial warmth both of face and speech; with his florid

periods as rounded and full as the flowing curves which expressed his outer man. Eloquent, charmingly eloquent, in spite of an occasional nasality, an orator every inch of him, aye, even though you measured him by superficial inches. His power of carrying an audience with him was immense, especially with a new audience ; when you got a little used to his fervent declamation and well-handled play of the passions you lost much of the first pleasure in hearing him, because there was much more play than passion. The finest fervour fails to move us if we once detect the tongue in the cheek.

Then there was straightforward, plain-speaking, honest, hard-headed, practical, "factical" Summers; the man of "arithmetical history," who would stolidly knock you down with a name, a date, or a fact, splendidly unconscious that they had not the most remote

influence on the intrinsic vitality of the argument.

He and the metaphysician were sworn combatants in the wordy war, but it was like the fight between a dog and a fish, they could neither of them approach the other. A shrewder foe in debate to our tall friend was Reding, keen and incisive in intellect, and largely gifted with a never-failing dry humour, and imperturbable good temper; argument never warmed him and defeat never discomposed him. A born jester—he looked upon life as a joke and the world as a medium for the dissemination of puns, good stories, funny songs, and *bon mots*. No one could ever be certain whether his reasonings, however shrewd, were intended for jest or earnest, and when he had cut down his opponent's argument, he planted nothing in its place.

It was before a large audience of critics

and opponents of this order, each of them long practised in debate, that Pierce had to make his first speech on the subject—"Should Cromwell have a Statue?" and he acquitted himself in the following fashion:—

"Mr. President and gentlemen—As you will very soon perceive that I am unaccustomed to public speaking, I will not be so 'superfluous' as to tell you this beforehand. It is, however, in an Englishman's nature to form his opinions on all great subjects, and it is his birthright to speak them out, however bluntly. I would therefore say that I think we should pay but little heed to the secondary argument that Cromwell deserves a statue as well as many others to whom this honour is awarded.

"We have not to concern ourselves with the *comparative* but with the *positive* merits of the man; not to say whether he does not

deserve a statue as well as some others, but whether he or they deserve one at all. Now, as the main object of honouring the dead is to excite the emulation of the living, it behoves a people to be cautious how they exalt qualities for imitation which they would not wish to see imitated.

"I am far from advocating the exclusion of genius from its due honour, simply because clouded by some venial failing, or tarnished by trifling defect, but where its failings become crimes, where its defects not only tarnish the surface but corrode the substance, it deserves no reverence from posterity, no statues to its memory.

"Cromwell's genius was self-neutralizing; it laboured in the first part of his career to demolish the strongholds of Tyranny, and it laboured in the last part to build them up again for his own use.

"Now, the greatness of a genius of this kind merely serves to render its possessor more widely mischievous, and we should pass judgment with more caution upon the character of the man, when we know that that judgment is apt to be biassed by our admiration of the hero.

"No one can attentively peruse the history of Cromwell without undergoing many revotions of opinion as the different phases of his character present themselves. In his earlier life of riot, rudeness and debauchery, we feel disgust at the coarseness of his mind and the boorish violence of his manners, whilst in his sudden conversion to sanctity there is much ground for suspicion of hypocrisy. But when in the stormy years of danger we find him side by side with Pym and Hampden, boldly denouncing Tyranny in all its pride of place, and standing forth as the unflinching

advocate of England's liberty, admiration succeeds disgust, and we recognise in that rude, forcible eloquence, that overwhelming vehemence, a Genius fitted for the times he lived in—the Man that England needed.

"Again we note him first in the field, and whilst other men were thinking, he acted and struck the first decisive blow before friends or foes had had time to rank themselves; we follow him on from success to success, through that fierce and desolating war; we see him organising that splendid regiment of Ironsides, the terror even of the gallant cavaliers, we see also the right and ready judgment by which he roused in his army the counterspell of religion, and thus brought the higher enthusiasm of devotion to God to act against the lower one of loyalty to a king. By skill in the council and bravery in the fight, he achieved grade after grade of mili-

tary glory, and our admiration rising with his fortunes, we own in the Lord General of all the forces of Great Britain and Ireland—the most consummate warrior of his time, the greatest man of his day.

"Thus far, well—but now we have to follow him through different scenes; his career no longer lies amidst camps and battlefields, but amongst the statesmen of Westminster, and the intrigues and politics of courts and cabals. In this changed arena the man also is changed. Instead of the brave and single-hearted soldier we see a whining, fawning hypocrite. Kindred, country, friends, all are sacrificed with unsparing cold-blooded villainy to the one mad passion of selfish ambition. Tampering equally with all parties in the State, and playing them against each other, creating dissensions and fomenting discontents, we find him still attended by successes;

but they are successes with which no honest mind can any longer sympathise. It is at this crisis of his history that it appears to me we are called upon to decide his merits and demerits, for it is at this crisis that his conduct exercised most influence over the future destinies of England.

"At this point, then, I rest my plea against him upon the sole ground of his dissolution of the Long Parliament. This Parliament, which, be it remembered, had been deputed by the British nation to resist the encroachments of tyranny, had shown itself most worthy of that trust. By its forces, both by land and sea, great achievements had been wrought. Tranquillity had been restored to England; Scotland had been humbled and Ireland subdued. Under its appointment the British navy first acquired that empire of the seas of which we to this day are so justly

proud. By the vigour of its Government and the skill of its statesmen it caused England to be feared and respected, and the name of Englishmen to be honoured throughout the world.

"Whilst thus conquering and negotiating at home and abroad, it was carrying through with unwearied energy the details of the great work it had begun, that of securing by wholesome laws the stability of a Government and the happiness and liberty of a people. It established the right of the subject to the writ of *habeas corpus*, caused judges to hold their offices free from the influence of the central Government, abolished the flagrant abuses of State-wardships, prohibited the impressment of soldiers and seamen, instituted the system of postage throughout the country, commenced salutary reformations in the law, and finally, having framed for this country a

most comprehensive plan of national representation, had fixed a day for its dissolution, thus intending to yield freely into the hands of the nation that power it had wielded so long and so well.

"Had this intention been allowed to run its course, England's freedom would have been established upon so sure a basis that no after-intrigues would have disturbed it. Cromwell foresaw in this the destruction of his hopes of the crown; hence his ambition prompted him to throw the State into anarchy, that in the general confusion he might seize upon the supreme power. History shows how fully his stratagem succeeded, and the remainder of his career is merely a succession of acts of lawless oppression, each one more violent and tyrannical than its precursor, until at last the whole Empire was crushed beneath the arbitrary rule of this unprincipled despot.

"Thus did he cancel the obligations which his country would have owed him, and transformed the praises of gratitude into the curses of fear. If, then, to such a man we are to raise a statue, let it stand as a warning to Ambition, and not as a memento of Patriotism. And on its pedestal, beneath that heavy foot that trampled upon Freedom, let there be inscribed in letters of blood—

"'This is the madman who, having fought for Liberty and won her, stabbed her to the heart in the hour of victory.'"

A burst of applause greeted the conclusion of his maiden effort, and Pierce for a few triumphant minutes, had a vision of himself in Parliament rivalling Burke and Sheridan.

Poor boy! that vision was quickly transformed into a dissolving view. When the

first shower-bath of cold criticism fell on his head it nearly took his breath away.

First the tall metaphysician rose to his full height, and, looking severely over his spectacles at Pierce, stutteringly hammered away at the logic of the argument until there was not a syllogism left uncracked, nor a point uncontested.

Then the "factical" man quoted dates with an astounding accuracy to show that "that was before this, and this before that."

Then the humourist made fun of everything, and a capital joke on the King's execution.

And lastly, the stout orator worked himself up into such a splendid sham frenzy, and brewed such a terrific storm in a teacup, that poor Pierce was completely overwhelmed in it, and freely confessed that he made a shocking muddle of his reply.

A modest supper followed, over which the bitter opponents shook hands with the same delightful geniality that is exhibited by the rival counsel in a lawsuit, and their great client was speedily forgotten in flowing bowls of punch.

In the study of the noteworthy characters of the club, Pierce found frequent amusement, and learnt also his first lessons in the patient and good-tempered endurance of criticism, which is perhaps one of the most valuable acquirements that a young man can make. With one of these chance-companions he held a still closer friendship for a time—a man whose many noble qualities and wild humour were infinitely refreshing to our over-worn student, but withal so uncontrollably pugnacious, that a pitched battle somewhere or at some time was sure to be the result of a night-about-town, spent in his company.

Theatre, concert-room, supper-house, coal-hole street, 'twas all the same, he would be in the blandest and most genial of tempers one moment, and then flash! crack! like a spark on powder, some real or fancied affront would bring a sudden explosion of wrath, and before Pierce had the slightest idea of what he was fighting for, he would find himself shoulder to shoulder with his excited friend, the centre of a wild *mêlée*. Of course he was an Irishman, and the causes of quarrel, when he tried to explain them afterwards, were so infinitely ridiculous that the Doctor (with whom also O'Sullivan was a great favourite) used to laugh till he cried at the absurdity. Sometimes "the dirty blackguard wanted to pass me on the wrong side, sir," sometimes "he touched my cane in passing, sir," and "sure my cane knew how to take care of itself, and pretty

soon laid itself across the truculent rascal's shoulders." Once "because I throd on his toes and he didn't beg my pardon for getting in my way," and once "because the grinning villain looked at me when I sneezed." This last escapade was in the middle of a grand tragedy at Covent Garden, to which Pierce and he had gone. The wild row that ensued and the unpleasant prominence that the affair assumed, made him cautious of his Hibernian friend for some time; hence the after-companionship was limited to quiet little suppers at the Doctor's chambers, which Pierce now shared with the dear old fellow. It was a great evening for the young men when Noulaiton would join them, but he, being so popular in society generally, and so much in request in learned societies in particular, could not often give them that pleasure. Many 's the pleasant evening I have had with

these old friends (now alas! no more), sometimes as guest, sometimes as host in my own old-fashioned chambers; for my brothers deserting me early to assume the dignities and duties of married life, I was left very young and alone in the old city house we had occupied as a family, so that I had my fencing-room, billiard-room, and study, beside the usual reception and bedrooms. The fencing-room was an especial attraction to our pugnacious O'Sullivan, for 'twas there he could flash away with mimic rapiers the exuberant fighting-power with which he had been so lavishly endowed. He was a good swordsman too, and we had to use eye and wrist to the best of our knowledge and power to hold our own against his rash impetuosity. I had the gloves for my other friends, but always ordered them to be locked up when O'Sullivan was coming, for they were too much for his

philosophy. On one occasion in a rally with a tall antagonist, who knew very little about boxing, he was carried away by the enthusiasm of having something big to hit at, and pounded him about the room most unmercifully, firmly believing it was a real, instead of a sham fight. Of course I insisted on his leaving the house, and sending a written apology to my unlucky visitor, but my trusty factotum had strict charge henceforth to put away the gloves as soon as he had shown "Mr. O'Sullivan" in. We had old-fashioned customs in those days, riding or fencing before breakfast, hard study or stern business after. The hour for dinner was two, three, or four o'clock, according to convenience. Both at this meal and supper I generally had two or three chance-guests, either intimate friends who knew they would always find a welcome, or men from the country or abroad, bringing

letters of introduction. The meals were simple, seldom exceeding soup or fish and joint; a hogshead of the best ale that could be had for love or money was always "to the fore" and port for our English friends, Burgundy for our Frenchmen, Madeira for Indians, and whiskey punch for the O's and Mac's formed the humble list of "drinks." Thus with alternate chat and billiards, followed by coffee at 6 or 8, and supper any time between 10 a.m., and 2 p.m., the afterdays or nights used to fly past merrily enough. Many and many a time men, over head and ears with business affairs, and with only a few days to stay in London, have come in ostensibly to take a hurried meal with us on promise of being let go directly afterward, and yet if it so chanced that Pierce and the Doctor, or O'Sullivan or William Langdale

were of the party, our new acquaintances would forget all about their affairs, and, carried away by the light flow of gaiety and the easy unforced mirth of the hour, would stay on and on, far into the small hours ; and many a staunch and valued friendship has sprung up to grow and last through a life time, whose first seed was sown amongst the wild oats of those long past days. 'Tis a pity one cannot realise the immortal "Munchausen's atmosphere into which all the mirth and music of one age might rise and be congealed ready to be thawed into audible sounds for another—but alas! even the warm breath of memory can only revive a few broken tones, and to attempt to reproduce the crisp sparkling converse, the quick thrust and retort of repartee, the unforced sally of wit, or the dry fun of humour, would be as hopeless and in

as bad taste as to offer you a glass of yesterday's champagne. Hence, lest I be tempted to attempt the impossible, let us ring down the curtain over my bachelor-home and ring it up again at "Wolfern Chace."

CHAPTER III.

WHILST Pierce and Noulaiton were busy seeking their philosopher's stone, whilst the debating club men were ransacking metaphysics, science and history for systems and facts, whereby they could "confute, change sides, and still confute;" whilst my wilder friends were outvying each other in their reckless and rollicking wine parties, and jeopardising both health and pockets by many foolish doings, life had not absolutely stood still at Wolfern Chace. A country life is not very eventful, but still time comes and goes somewhat like the periodical pedlar, sometimes bringing pretty

things enough for us, but always claiming full payment in return, and not infrequently robbing us of some of our silver spoons. For the dear young girlies of the house, however, he had the gallantry (or the cunning) to bring dainty ornaments for mind and body, until they were the recognised and undisputed belles of the county, and 'twas beginning to be wondered why they had not been the innocent causes of setting a certain other kind of bells ringing. Those who so wondered were chiefly the married ladies, who, as you know, always take a deep interest in their unwedded friends. Shall we men-kind flatter ourselves that it is because the wives, having drawn such good prizes in the lottery of life, are benevolently desirous that their young friends should be equally fortunate and happy, or must we rather confess to the lurking suspicion that our lawful spouses

having found out their own mistake in matrimony, are maliciously scheming to lure all their sex into the same troubled waters? Or is there a medium motive: a mere womanly desire for a change of some, or any kind, whether for better or worse, combined with an intense love of seeing "ducks of wedding dresses, pets of bonnets and loves of trinkets?" If I might venture an opinion on so delicate a question, I would infer that Lady Langdale (irrespective of her affectionate desire to retain her daughters with her for so long as it could be to their good) acted upon the first motive; Lady Blandville on the second, and Mrs. William Langdale on the third. The following dialogue between the ladies in question may give some colour to my otherwise impertinent inference.

"I wonder," said Lady Blandville, "you

do not bring Caroline and Mildred more into society, my dear, it is really quite a shame that two such charming girls should run the risk of being married to some country bumpkin."

"I do not think it either needful or wise at present," replied Lady Langdale. "They are still young, and by no means strong enough to bear the racket of a London life."

"But, my dear Lady Langdale, it is most important that girls should see and be seen early. I consider it the highest duty of a mother to secure a good match for her daughters."

"Not quite the highest, in my opinion. I think some little attention might be spared for their health, high principles and education."

"Oh, of course; but you have done all that *à merveille;* every one wonders at your

devotion to your daughters; their 'principles' they have both by inheritance and example, and their education is finished."

"There also I must differ from you; their instructions are nearly completed, I allow, but their education is only just commencing; and I should prefer having some hand in that myself, rather than leave the whole of so delicate a task to a husband."

"You are quite right," said Mrs. Langdale, "husbands are very unfit for such a task; they want educating themselves."

Lady Blandville.—"That is a task Mrs. Langdale has executed most thoroughly."

"Yes, I flatter myself I have trained mine well, and I think Caroline has a good deal of that tact and decision which enables a woman to take the reins early."

"How old is she, dear?"

"Only seventeen."

"Ah! just the age at which I was brought out. It then took me a year to collect a sufficient choice of suitors, and three months more to see which I liked best. Heigh-ho! I wonder whether I chose the best after all! He's a dear, good, kind, generous old monster, and loves me hugely. Yes, I think, on the whole, I was right. I almost agree with Lady Blandville that Caroline should make a beginning; besides, a wedding is such fun, and would waken up your dull old country house famously."

"Fun, my dear sister Langdale, that ends in terrible earnest sometimes. No, I cannot look upon married life as the sole aim of women, nor can I think of it as a mere lottery box, in which a girl must dip her hand to take her chance of a blank or a prize."

"Ah, these are, I believe, the notions of your dear friend, Madame de Genlis. By-

the-by, what a charming little dedication of her work to you this is; you ought to be a proud woman, really, for I see Sir John Carr has also immortalised you in a dedication."

"They are very dear friends, and it is a great pleasure to be remembered."

"Have you read either of the works, Lady Blandville?" enquired Mrs. Langdale.

"Oh dear, no! I seldom read anything but the 'Morning Post.'

"Ah, I thought not. Of course you read the 'Births, Deaths, and Marriages' religiously."

"Well, yes, the marriages always, the births sometimes—the deaths I leave to the old people."

"You are quite right, it is always the old people who read the deaths in the papers. I shuddered the other morning to see a decrepit, tottering man, with scarce a tooth in his head,

peering eagerly through his spectacles at what the dreadful monster called the 'Dead List,' and chuckling with a weak, palsied chuckle when he saw the name of a former acquaintance."

"Possibly he was merely congratulating himself that his own name was not in the list. But to return to my point; you know I'm very pertinacious, my dear; but seriously, you must let Caroline and Mildred, or, better still, one at a time come and stay with me, and I'll find a good husband for her, if there's one left."

"Thank you, dear Lady Blandville. You have been so fortunate in your own case, that it would not be reasonable to expect an equal good fortune in another."

"Had her there," thought Mrs. Langdale, but she only innocently enquired, "How is poor Sir George's gout, dear?"

"Oh, very bad indeed, very bad, and it makes his temper so unendurable that I send him to his club as much as possible."

"He did not take you to Bath for the grand *fête?*" said Lady Langdale.

"Well, no, the fact was, we knew all the common folk would be flocking down, and that we should be mobbed."

"Ah, that was rather a pity; Fallington tells us it was a most brilliant time there. How do you like your new carriage horses?"

"Well, a—a—Sir George was very stupid and obstinate in that matter, and whilst he was trying to get them for twenty guineas less than the fellow demanded, some one else was impertinent enough to buy them."

This little innocent cross-examination by the two sisters-in-law had the desired effect of checking Lady Blandville's pertinacity,

and shortly afterwards the ladies dispersed to dress for dinner.

It was a custom with Sir Geoffrey, when at the Chace, to meet his guests at breakfast, luncheon and dinner, but for all the intermediate hours he took leave to follow his own pursuits, whether in the field, the woods, the laboratory or the study.

Any who took interest in such pursuits were fully welcome to join him in whatsoever was the occupation of the day or season, but the mere idlers who cared for no greater feat than that of killing time by passing from one kind of amusement to another, he left to the ladies and their own devices, simply taking care that ample change of amusement was always at hand for them. This enabled him to extend hospitality to the aforesaid idlers without being bored by them in return, and to get, almost imperceptibly, through a large

amount of work, both official, literary, and scientific; moreover, it gave the freshness of reunion when each and all again met at table.

It is perfectly marvellous to reflect how often, by what is called "standing on ceremony," men entirely defeat the real object of society, and turn that which ought to be a refreshment and a stimulant into an intolerable wearines to the flesh.

I think it was in the Italian dungeons that they used the horrible torture of chaining incongruous men together, but here, there and everywhere you may see men chained together by ceremony until they hate each other with an almost deadly hatred. This was happily avoided at Wolfern Chace, so that the busy and the idle kept apart, or came together with a fine interchange of toleration.

Gilbert, as was natural to his age, had a strong leaning for the lighter amusements,

especially outdoor and athletic; but partly by inheritance, and partly by example, he had already a wholesome contempt for the mere frittering away of life, and an enthusiastic and intelligent interest in all Sir Geoffrey's varied doings. The variety of them was an especial charm to a young receptive mind, because, not straining it too long and wearily in one direction. The intellectual contact with many different classes of men gave a certain piquancy to the "gatherings" at the Chace; the representative men of science, literature, art and drama were deftly mingled, or alternated with statesmen, soldiers, lawyers, divines and dandies.

The dinner of to-day comprised only the last four—Colonel Falconer, Sir George, the Rev. Thomas Maxwell and Fallington.

Caroline and Gilbert, although caring very little for the grander affairs, were

well pleased to join this, and, incongruous as the guests seemed, it was a bright little party.

When the ladies retired, the men drew together to discuss the events of the war, the law, the Church, the neighbourhood, and the *beau-monde.* Sir Geoffrey led off, touching the Colonel's key-note. Bonaparte was then a name at whose sound the English mane stood up instantly, and to ask a soldier what were the next probable successes of that marvellous child of Fortune was a species of goad to the most phlegmatic; hence, to our hot Colonel, 'twas like spark to gunpowder, and produced a rapid explosion.

"Do, sir!" he exclaimed, "what will he not do? Europe's far too small a place to hold such a big little man. He'll go next and pull the great Khan of Tartary by the beard, and put out the brother of the Sun

and Moon in China, in order to put another brother of his own in her place."

"I don't think he's got another brother to spare," said Sir Geoffrey, "I think they have all got thrones already."

"Ah, well, he'll make one; he seems able to create anything."

"Yes, after first destroying everything," said Dr. Maxwell.

"Destruction must precede creation, sir," retorted the Colonel.

"Not always," said Sir George. "You are aware that the creation of laws preceded the destruction of justice."

"You would not hear your enemies say so," observed Dr. Maxwell.

"No, we lawyers always slander ourselves to prevent others from slandering us."

"Yes, like setting fire to the prairie before you, to arrest the fire that is coming after," said the Colonel.

"H'm! rather a warm simile, and painfully suggestive of a hotter one," said Gilbert aside to Fallington.

"Oh, never mind—however warm it may be, trust Sir George for taking it coolly," replied Fallington, "but," he continued, aloud, to the Colonel, "do you think Napoleon will again attempt the invasion of England?"

"Of course he will—but he won't tell you when—nor any one else for that matter; the secret of that man's success is that he puts large confidence in his marshals, but does not make confidants of them."

Dr. Maxwell.—"A fine distinction, Colonel; he takes others' counsel and keeps his own."

Sir Geoffrey.—"Yes, he is rather good at taking and keeping most things; he is a fair judge of pictures, for example, and thinks a central world-museum in Paris will be for the benefit of mankind."

Sir George.—"If his taste was merely for

pictures I think we, in England, might be safe."

Sir Geoffrey.—"There is no artist here to-day, happily for you, Sir George, or he would infallibly paint your portrait in revenge."

Sir George.—"Thank you, very much! Would that be so terrible a revenge?"

Sir Geoffrey.—"He would be able to make it so, because the handsomest face is spoilt by a cynical expression, but we must not cross swords even in jest in the presence of a common foe."

Colonel.—"A very uncommon foe, Sir Geoffrey, in my opinion. An Attila, an instrument, I believe, in the hands of a Divine Providence."

"Permit me humbly to differ from you there," said Dr. Maxwell. "It would show little divinity in Providence to use such an instrument."

"On a point of divinity we must, of course, yield to the Church; but bad as the fellow is, I believe he has his use in knocking down and burning up old rotten effete systems of war and government; and even if we ourselves have to pass through the fiery ordeal, it will serve us right for clinging to corruption and shutting our eyes and ears to the needs of modern war."

Sir George.—"You talk very coolly about passing through the fiery ordeal. You surely don't, eh—you cannot seriously mean that the attempt at invasion will be renewed."

Colonel.—"Why not? The whole of Europe is now at the feet of Napoleon; he has just given back a bit of it to Austria in exchange for a wife, and seems inclined to share the remainder with Alexander, most probably in exchange for that romantic potentate's daughter."

Sir Geoffrey.—"Wellesley's counter attack in the Peninsula will go far to avert invasion."

Colonel.—"Not if it ends in more Cintras and exchanges of generals three times in a day."

Dr. Maxwell.—"But our fleet, Colonel!"

Colonel.—"Aye! excellent! unrivalled! but it is possible for fleets to be dispersed by storms, or enticed away cunningly as ours would have been if Villeneuve and Gantheaume had used their wits instead of losing their courage, and then what is to prevent the crossing and landing of his splendidly-handled veteran troops, and what have we to oppose them? Raw yokels from the plough—plethoric shopkeepers, and nimble counter-skippers, with an aristocratic infusion of lawyers' and bankers' clerks as a contingent. Pretty fellows these in their way, and useful—

in their several vocations—but soldiers? Bah! mere food for powder?"

Dr. Maxwell.—"Might I presume to suggest, Colonel Falconer, that if the country is in peril, England may surely expect her tried and experienced officers like yourself to warn her of her danger and aid her when it comes."

Colonel.—"England expects nothing of the kind, sir. Warnings are looked upon as unpardonable impertinences until danger comes; and feather-bed officers smother the veterans. When the foe is absolutely at our doors my sword will again be at the service of my country; till then, she does not want me, and shall not have me."

Sir Geoffrey.—"Are not your views a little too extreme, almost eccentric, dear Falconer?"

Colonel.—"My dear Sir Geoffrey, I glory in the term; and I am proud to think that we six men sitting round your hospitable board

this evening are all eccentric. In a nation of fools and knaves eccentricity means wisdom and honesty. An ordinary 'common-sense' man would be a highly eccentric being in a commonwealth of monkeys, and would stand a chance of being nearly as badly treated as a genius is amongst men."

Sir Geoffrey.—"But I do not pretend to be a genius! What is my eccentricity?"

Colonel.—"Why, you have devoted ten years of your life, and half your fortune to confer an immense boon on agriculture, and the farmers mistake you for a fool."

Sir George.—"And mine?"

Colonel.—"You have dipped deeply into science as well as law, and the bar makes the same mistake in your case. Whilst our reverend friend, Maxwell, daring to have the courage of his opinions, bars himself from a bishopric by his eccentricity."

Gilbert.—"I hope I'm too young to have that unenviable distinction."

Colonel.—"Not a bit. You have ventured to write from the inspiration of your own heart rather than give feeble echoes of what was dinned into your ears at college, and you know too well what the critics say of you. Mr. Fallington's eccentricity sits upon him with an easier grace; being chiefly external he can change it whenever he pleases for one of another fashion. But come, Sir Geoffrey, I must keep up my character with Lady Langdale by moving an adjournment to the drawing-room."

The ladies meantime had renewed their discussion of the morning (much against Lady Langdale's wish) in presence of Caroline and Mildred. Lady Blandville could not make any better way with the girls than with their mother, and doubtless gave

them up in her heart of hearts as a pair of impracticables. To Caroline's already won affections any temptations that society might otherwise have had were wholly powerless, and to Mildred's sensitive pride the mere suspicion of being trotted out in the matrimonial market was simply revolting. So they quickly took refuge from the proposals in music, and avoided discord by harmony. When the gentlemen entered the drawing-room Mr. Fallington attached himself to Caroline, and in a considerably less languid voice than usual, said—

"Miss Langdale, we have been discussing the chances of an invasion, and I've been thinking what a delightful thing it would be to have some one we loved to defend."

"Have you not a mother, Mr. Fallington?"

"Oh, ah! Yes, of course—but I didn't

mean that—you see she belongs to my father —not to me."

"Well, no, I did not suppose she belonged to you. Mothers are not generally considered the property of their children."

"I meant some one that one loved very much."

"Flattering to your mother very."

"And that loved one very much in return," said Fallington, not heeding the interruption.

"Is that a riddle?" said Caroline, "because if so, I am a bad guesser, and must give it up."

"Women are all riddles—they ought to be able to guess them."

"How! Can a riddle guess itself? What a clever riddle it would be."

"Suppose I were a riddle, would you try and guess me?"

"I 'guess not,' as our American friends would say."

"Suppose you were a riddle, would you let me guess you?"

"You would be sure to guess wrong, and have to guess again."

"You are, indeed, a sphinx, Miss Langdale, but can't you sympathize with me in having nothing to love and no one that loves me?"

"Then self-love is not mutual, I suppose, Mr. Fallington?" said Caroline, innocently.

"Ah, but I want to love some one besides myself."

"Well, perhaps you might be able, if you tried very hard, but you would run the risk of being nearly beside yourself if you succeeded."

"Why?"

"Because love is either like genius, a long madness, or like anger, a short one."

"Should I rouse your anger if I confessed to such madness?"

"I should much prefer a lucid interval."

"Ah, Miss Langdale, you are too cruel. I need not seek to defend any one else, for I can't defend myself against your arrows."

"Oh! I only shoot folly as it flies."

"Folly is a very foolish bird to come within range of your shot. I'll go and see if your sister is less severe."

With a somewhat offended air in his bow, he crossed to the piano at which Mildred was sitting, having just completed one of those brilliant pieces of music that enables every one to talk quite unreservedly during its performance. Fallington of course complimented the young lady on her execution, style, and taste, and this he was able to do with the greatest sincerity, not having listened to a single passage. Meantime Lady Blandville had attacked Caroline, and cross-examined her closely as to what Mr. Fallington

had been saying to her and why he had gone away.

Caroline laughingly replied to her questioner,

"Oh, he only wanted some one to love and defend in case these dreadful French try to invade us again."

"Indeed! my dear, did he tell you this?"

"Yes, and a good deal more than this! and he has told me a great deal like it before!"

"Upon my word, Miss Caroline, you have reason to be proud of your conquest."

"Have I? But it is not made yet; it is only a possible invasion at present."

"Ah, but it means that you have made a conquest of a very possible invader."

"Quite unintentional, I assure you."

"Oh, young ladies, never should have any intentions until the gentlemen declare theirs."

Caroline did not consider it necessary to

explain that whatever intentions the gentleman might declare, the lady would maintain her own, and happily at this moment Mr. Fallington had persuaded Mildred to sing a ballad, which she did in a clear, fresh young voice, with a grace and finish that enchanted that fickle young gentleman. Looking at her with a rapt attention during the song, the delicate charm of her voice, and the Hebe-like beauty of her face and figure began to work a counter-spell on his easily-moved heart. The words of the song touched his present key-note; for in those days the words of a song were considered of some slight importance to the general effect, and they were not therefore smothered under an avalanche of music. It was a long, quaint old legend, which had been written by Gilbert to please her, and to which she herself had set a simple accompaniment—

" Sir Roland loved a Saxon maid
Gentle and fair to see,
But the King had called for Roland's aid
To his wars in Normandie.

" Sir Roland said, ' what e'er befals,
To my King I will be leal,
And love must wait when loyalty calls,'
For he was true as steel.

" The fight was fought, the fight was won,
The Knight sailed back with speed,
But a traitor Baron a deed had done,
A foul and cruel deed.

" With ruthless hand at dead of night
Her grandsire old he slew,
Then seized the maid and took to flight
With his lawless robber crew.

" But a serf had marked the robbers' track,
And traced them to their lair,
So when Sir Roland hastened back
The faithful serf was there.

" There in the home deserted, lorn,
He spake swift words and blunt,
Saying ' Sir Knight to-morrow morn
The Baron goes to hunt.

" ' If thou and threescore men, brave knight,
Well mounted, clad in mail,
Will ride with me till morning light
Thou canst him then assail.

" 'Hid in a wood, near by the gate
Await thy traitor foe,
And if thy hate is like my hate
He'll need no second blow.'

" So said, so done, by early morn
Sir Roland waited there,
And when the Baron wound his horn,
Sprang from his leafy lair.

" With shouts and cries in fierce *mêlée*,
With crashing lance and brand,
Back thro' the gates in savage fray
Was driven the robber band.

" The maiden looked from her eyrie tower,
And uttered a joyful cry,
To see the Baron fall and cower,
And her Roland's sword flash high.

" There's the ring of a spur on the turret stair,
There's the crash of an iron hasp,
There's a joy has entered in place of despair
To hold her in loving clasp."

When the song ended, Fallington showered rose-leaf compliments on the fair singer, and said—

"I often wish we lived in those heroic days. How delightful it must have been to rescue one's lady-love."

"Very inspiriting for the knights, but scarcely so delightful for the ladies. Supposing some dreadful ogre of a Baron from the next county were to come to-night, and put me on a "nightmare" and carry me away to a very cold castle, I should not like it at all."

"But you would have a score of Sir Rolands galloping up next morning to rescue you."

"Well, even that would be inconvenient, because I could only marry one of my deliverers; so that after they had killed the bad Baron, I fear they would have to kill each other to determine who should have me."

"The best man would be sure to win."

"The biggest and strongest would, but suppose the lady had no liking for the biggest and strongest, I think it would be rather hard that she should be obliged to have him."

"None but the brave deserve the fair."

"No great bravery for a strong, thick-headed giant, who could carry dreadfully heavy armour and wield a lance and a sword of portentous length to poke weaker knights off their horses, with a stolid grin at their higher but hopeless courage. The bravery was always with the weakest in those days, as it often is in these."

"In our present wars your reproach does not hold good."

"Well, I grant you that now the big men do have an opportunity of distinguishing themselves, because they offer a larger mark."

"A distinguished opportunity which sharp-shooters avail themselves of very freely."

"But even in these times size and strength can take an unfair advantage. For example, my father's eldest brother, when a cornet in a cavalry regiment, had conceived a great dislike to a small officer, and being a man of

almost fabulous power, he, at a sham fight, rode up to the object of his enmity, and seizing him by his belt, lifted him out of the saddle, and literally 'held him up to ridicule,' by riding with him thus sprawling in the air, and finally dropping him into the arms, and almost on to the bayonets, of the pretended foe."

"Ha! ha! ha! Next to the pleasure of executing such a masterly stratagem oneself, would have been that of seeing it."

"For shame. You men always pretend to take the weaker side in a quarrel, and yet you always really do take the strongest. Now, although I could not help laughing when papa first told me this, we always pitied the small officer."

"Pity is akin to love; could you have loved him, too?"

"H—m, no! and that makes the matter

more cruel. I'm afraid we never love a man when he is once laughed at."

"Present company always excepted, I hope."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you and your sister are always laughing at me, you know."

"I shall do so again, if you give me such a fair opportunity; but let us revert to your wish for the old chivalric days. Don't you think the armour would have hurt you a great deal? You often say you don't like to be hurt."

"Oh, I would have had it made to fit me splendidly. Don't you think a man looks very well in armour?"

"Ha! ha! I wonder whether amongst the armourers there was a kind of grim Stultz to whom the dandy warriors resorted for a 'perfect fit?' But how cold it must

have been in winter, and how very hot in summer; just fancy galloping about on a monstrous rough-paced waggon-horse under the full blaze of a July sun, knocking violently with spear or sword at an iron-plated warrior, and being knocked about most unmercifully in turn."

"Well, when you put it in that way, it doesn't look so pleasant as at first sight, but then it gave a man a chance of showing his gallantry by wearing his lady's glove in his helmet."

"What an interesting collection of gloves you would have made, Mr. Fallington."

"I should have been proud of one only—if I could have had your hand in it."

"I should have had much pleasure in giving it to you; for one dance in an evening."

"But would there have been any heart in it?"

"Oh, Mr. Fallington, we do not carry our hearts in our hands; that would be an odd trick."

"But you would not object to diamonds on your fingers?"

"Ha! ha! that's following suit very cleverly, but I think you must have used a spade and dug deeply for those diamonds."

"No, you inspire me with wit by the brightness of another pair of diamonds."

"Meaning my eyes, of course; very pretty, but the simile is not quite original, and not exactly to the purpose. Clubs were trumps you know; 'arms and the man.'"

"Let us drop the clubs."

"Oh, by all means, but I thought you men were so fond of them."

"So we are, but we are fonder of the ladies."

"Ah, 'fond' means 'foolish' in that case."

"Would you think me foolish if I were fond of you?"

"'Thought is free,' Mr. Fallington; but you will think me so if I allow you to talk any more nonsense. We have been playing with cards in one way; let us go and watch the players in another."

With a slightly impatient toss of her head, Mildred moved across, so as to sit within sight and hearing of her mother, who had taken a hand at whist, and Fallington, being thus baffled from pursuing the subject farther, shortly afterwards joined Gilbert and the Colonel in the billiard-room, feeling rather like a shuttlecock sent to and fro between two battledores.

Caroline, of course, with her love for Pierce, felt a very sincere contempt for the young exquisite. To Mildred, whose affections had not deepened into those of woman-

hood, he was simply indifferent, and yet the poor fellow was passing through a difficult crisis of his life. Hitherto he had been quite content to admire women, and love himself; but now, drawn by a subtle attraction like a moth to flame, he had fluttered about and displayed his fine wings to these two young beauties until those fine wings were visibly singed. He could have flirted and coquetted with mere belles of the ball-room for several seasons with perfect safety, but he did not calculate the powerful, because wholly unconscious, fascination exercised by pure young girlhood in its place of power "Home."

The simple graces of the daily life, the unforced gaiety, the unstudied play of the affections, to a man accustomed only to artificial society, opens a new and enchanting view of the possibilities of life which is charming alike from its novelty and freshness.

He feels like one of the inhabitants of some distant planet, in which all was either frigid coldness or fierce glare, suddenly permitted to enter a sphere where everything is softened and toned, where the frigid coldness is thawed by sunny sympathies, and the fierce glare moderated to a genial warmth. This had stimulated within him the craving to love and be loved by something higher than himself; but the desire acting upon a fickle nature, rendered still more inconstant by habit, bewildered rather than ennobled it. The same crisis in life comes to all men, but with different influences on different characters: to the man of chivalric honour, of singleness of heart, of stability of purpose, love sounds a clarion that rouses every latent nobleness, exalts and intensifies every dormant power; but to the selfish it is more like the twanging of an overstrung fiddle, producing

a restless uneasiness, from which the sufferer makes frantic but weakling efforts to escape. The mere star-hunting instinct, which had been hitherto alike his weakness and his strength, forsook him at this conjuncture, and left him wholly at the mercy of Cupid, a god more capricious than the man himself.

After a single game of billiards, the three men returned to the drawing-room, and meantime the whist players had finished their game and had prevailed on Sir Geoffrey to sing some of their favourite old songs from Herrick and Suckling, one of which, "Why so pale and wan, young lover," was painfully apposite to Fallington's present condition.

Sir Geoffrey's voice was a rich mellow baritone, and possessed that singular charm of expressing, with the clearest and most bell-like truth, the genial nature of the man himself. It did not seem to come from either

his head or his chest, but freshly and directly from his heart; the voice was simply the "uttered" man. In the grand old bacchanalian and hunting choruses of those days, or in the half-bantering, half-tender love songs, mirth and pathos were rendered with a grace so perfect, that the smiles and tears of the audience were felt to lie very closely together by all who had any music in their souls, and even the dullest and longest ears were pricked up with an unwonted pleasure.

"When forced from dear Hebe to go" was another arrow all unconsciously shot at the hapless lover, for on the morrow he was returning to town, after a week's stay at the Chace. Hence, in desperation, gathering his wits together, he diplomatically ingratiated himself with Mrs. Langdale so successfully as to obtain from that lady a promise to invite her nieces to London in order that

they might be present at the Guards' ball; fully determining that if he could once get them to London, he would lay such a series of bright pleasures at their feet as must procure him some kindness and favour in return.

An old tactician in such matters, having planned and carried out similar campaigns with a score of "stars" in succession, his spirits began to rise again after obtaining this promise. Mrs. Langdale, although by no means such an inveterate match-maker as Lady Blandville, did not feel wholly insensible to the excitement of being accessory to a probable alliance for one of her two nieces, and being besides still young and gay enough to enjoy even girlish pleasure, she had not the slightest objection to join demurely, and, of course, quite unconsciously, in the little plot; Fallington, equally of course, urging the

arrangement as the only means a bachelor had of returning the courteous hospitalities of his friends at the Chace.

Transparent disguises these to the keen-eyed Lady Blandville, who felt a most natural and womanly anger to see the wind taken out of her sails by her "dear friend."

Mrs. Langdale prevailed with her sister-in-law next morning to let the girls go up with her for a week or two, and Fallington, thereupon, was in a seventh heaven of delight.

CHAPTER IV.

LANGDALE HOUSE.

MANY and bright had been our young girls' visits to the quaint capacious house in Broad Street; gloomy enough it looked outside, with its smoke-begrimed red bricks, its formidable spiked railings, and ancient torch-extinguisher on either side of the door-way, but when you once passed into that door-way, however thoroughly your torch of expectation had been extinguished outside, it was quickly relighted within.

The softest and richest of carpets gave a velvet silence to the footsteps, and the mellowed light of wax candles shone plea-

santly on dark oak carving and panels, the latter partially concealed by choice pictures in massive gold frames. The oak balustrades and chimney pieces were marvels of quaint art, from the hand of Grinling Gibbons, and the old-fashioned furniture and heavy curtains gave an air of repose and cosiness to every room in the house; to which, in winter time, large bright fires in all the bedrooms put the finishing touch.

The comfort of lady guests was zealously attended to by a staid, but most kind-hearted old housekeeper, whilst an old butler and an old footman, carefully foresaw and quickly supplied all the needs of the men visitors.

These may seem trivial matters of record, but any one who has had the misfortune to be a guest in a house where the servants are inattentive and wholly indifferent to his comfort, will appreciate this passing tribute to the

"antique service of the olden time." The butler, Perkins, considered himself privileged to imitate afar-off his master's humour and love of practical jokes, and seconded his most absurd assertions with a gravity that would have done honour to Punch's dog Toby; indeed, he was considerably like that immortal animal, with the same expression of pensive fun in the eyes, and the same combination of dignity and impudence in the mouth and nose; the same alacrity in pretending to snap and snarl, and the same thoroughly kindly and faithful heart under all these droll outward appearances. He had assisted to play off many a little hoax, even on the favoured young ladies from the Chace, when they were young; but his greatest delight seemed to be when his master astounded into blank dismay some of the schoolboy visitants. Sometimes after these unlucky youngsters

had been glorying in the expectation of a play for the evening, William Langdale would call out in stentorian tones, when Perkins brought in the wine at dinner—

"Perkins, did you tell me Covent Garden will be closed this evening?" whereupon Perkins, taking up his cue, would reply—

"Yes, sir, John Kemble's took seriously ill, sir, and Joe Grimaldi's broke his leg, sir."

"Dear, dear, what a pity boys!" would then exclaim the master of the house, and down would drop knives and forks from Charlie's and Harry's hands, and down would drop also the corners of the mouths, and wide open would go their surprised and disappointed eyes at the sudden crushing of their hopes of a "jolly play."

When master and man had enjoyed the thorough discomfiture of the "young rascals" long enough, William Langdale would fumble

in his pockets and deliberately put out the tickets, with an "Ah, well, Ann, I see it's all right, our tickets are for Drury Lane."

Sometimes these arch-plotters against boyish felicity would severally bring in and receive letters of sudden recall to home or school for one or all of them just on the eve of a juvenile ball, or pretend that their dress-suits had not been packed in their portmanteaux, or had been sent to the tailor's and not come back. Refined tortures these, but never suffered to last too long, and always generously healed by some after-pleasure. Dear, kindly-hearted tormentor! I have known him often carry a youngster on his great shoulder through the crush into the pit rather than let him be disappointed of the play, even though he had more than once lost his watch in doing so.

For the elder striplings approaching man-

hood, subtler and more merciless practical jokes were in store, especially if they made themselves fair game by priggish or dandified airs. In these plots the confederates secured an ally in the person of a bright-witted, twinkling-eyed housemaid, who, with deft fingers, would sew up the tails or sleeves of Mr. Dandy's dress coat, or the legs of his immaculate pantaloons, or change his spotless shirt and cravats for the huge garments of the same kind belonging to William Langdale; then, when by reason of some or all of these notable devices, our flurried and hurried dandy was too late for dinner, Perkins was all alert to add to his distress by ringing the dinner bell at as short and rapid intervals as the minute guns at sea, and by sending John, James, and Mary, one after another to knock at his door and tell him that dinner was on the table and waiting for him.

Descending thus, hot and excited, and looking very sheepish, he was, of course, eyed critically by William Langdale, with a look that spoke as audibly as a tongue, "Well, young gentleman, you haven't made much of your toilet, though you've taken a good while to do it."

Then for the unwary, another torture was in preparation. Perkins would bring in and place round on the floor champagne glasses of portentous length, standing, indeed, nearly as high as the table, whereupon William Langdale would address his young friend with an "Ah! Mr. Somerset, you have not seen my new champagne glasses before, I think." "Well, no, sir!" would reply our dandy, "don't think I've had that pleasure."

"Ah, well, you shall convince yourself of the importance of drinking champagne out of long glasses. You will find the aroma of

the wine much finer. The poet says that 'Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long,' but I dispute this assertion *in toto.* A man wants a good deal of champagne to counteract the real, and a long glass is evidently a lengthened enjoyment. Perkins, fill Mr. Somerset's glass."

The grave Perkins empties half a bottle into our friend's glass, and the other half into his master's, who, with a twinkle in his eye, challenges his guest with—

"A bumper and no heel taps, Somerset."

Poor Somerset, knowing that he has angered his host by his lateness, endeavours now to retrieve his character by complying with the challenge literally, to which he is the more inclined, being thirsty with his flurry.

Charming up to a certain point! The wine is as delicious as nectar; but alas, a fatal

turning-point is passed, and the Brobdignagian glass, once elevated above the level, pours a sudden cataract of hissing, fizzing wine into the unlucky victim's waistcoat.

Perkins's gravity is portentous and wholly irresistible, but when the inevitable laughter has subsided, Mrs. Langdale exclaims, from the head of the table—

"For shame, William; you ought to have known that Mr. Somerset could not drink so deeply as you."

"My dear," retorts William, "Mr. Somerset is a much deeper person than you imagine. There is nothing in the whole range of accomplishments, from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter, in which he is not an adept—a Crichton, a veritable Crichton, I assure you."

Meantime the poor, uncomfortably-moist fop (who had been boring his host for a long

hour with a flow of brag) sat looking ruefully down at his shirt-frill and spoilt waistcoat, much more like a drowned rat than a Crichton, and mentally resolved that he would save up his brag in future for his fond mother and admiring sisters.

Of course, practical jokes are "low," "vulgar," "bad form," &c., &c., but in those old rough days, when wielded by a man of genuine humour, and sound, penetrating judgment, they were a useful, though sharp, corrective to many of the surface-follies of younger men.

Mr. Langdale did not, however, escape the usual penalty of reprisals, from foeman worthy of his steel, for Fallington, who had more than once been victimised by his confederates, revenged his friend Somerset's wrongs (and his own) rather cleverly.

A day or two after the girls had arrived

with Mrs. Langdale from the Chace, he won their connivance and aid for a mild hoax in this wise :—He and they both knew well Mr. Langdale's horror of strong, masculine women, and hence it was plotted that Fallington, who was great at masqueing, should dress himself carefully in a loud and pronounced feminine costume, and demand to see the master of the house on urgent private business.

So planned, so done ; the faithful Perkins was spirited out of the way, and James bribed to sustain the jest. The lady was shown into the study, and Mr. Langdale glared at the unwelcome visitant from under his great shaggy eyebrows with uneasy eyes. Fallington carried out his part *à merveille*, and held the gentle monster fascinated by a long and carefully-prepared story, which, growing gradually more and more emotional, was

climaxed by the supposed lady rising from her chair and advancing, with an attempt to kiss her victim.

In a paroxysm of fear and rage, he shouted—

"Keep off, you nasty beast; don't you know I'm a married man? I'll knock you down if you come another step." And then, in still louder tones, he shouted—"Here! hi! Ann! Perkins! James! here's a mad woman in the house wants to kiss me."

Fallington flung his wig and bonnet high into the air at this signal triumph, and Mrs. Langdale and her nieces, throwing wide the door, through which they had been peeping, the tables were thoroughly turned upon Langdale, for that day at least.

The Guards' ball was a great success. Fallington's brother-officers almost mobbed him to know who the young beauties were

with whom he danced so much, and seemed so intimate.

Their Royal Highnesses also, two of whom were present, paid them marked attention. Of course, Fallington took care to keep the lion's share of the dances for himself, and when he did introduce other partners, they were not quite the handsomest nor the most brilliant of his comrades. This was very selfish, but perhaps not wholly unnatural.

Mrs. Langdale had that magnificent power of enjoyment which makes life a succession of festivals.

In her early prime, surrounded by everything that heart could desire, possessing a most winning face and manner and a perfect figure, being withal a graceful dancer and a brilliant talker, it would, indeed, have been singular if she had not enjoyed her life generally, and a Guards' ball in particular.

Some of the Guardsmen had at this time taken the tone of, "We of the tenth don't dance," and one of these was overheard by Mrs. Langdale replying to a friend, who wished to introduce him to her, by saying with a dandified air—

"Oh! aw! trot her out; which is she?"

The friend indicated which lady it was, and brought him up to ask her hand for the next dance.

Mrs. Langdale measured him from head to foot through her eye-glass with a critical smile, and said—

"No! no, thank you! Trot him back again, won't do."

Whereupon the discomfited "Man of the Tenth" retreated, looking slightly foolish. Must we confess that Caroline, despite her constancy to Pierce, also enjoyed the evening with a considerable amount of *abandon*

that even surprised herself; she suffered for this afterwards, for the next day's headache had some heartache in it also. For Mildred, her first grand ball, it had happiness without regrets, and when William Langdale teased her next morning at breakfast-time about her partners, she saucily confessed that Mr. Fallington danced very well and was not quite so silly as usual.

This was quite enough of the thin edge of the wedge for that inveterate tease, who forthwith bantered her into merry blushes during the remainder of the day.

For the next evening Fallington had secured a box at Covent Garden to see Mrs. Siddons, as "Lady Macbeth," with a new aspirant for dramatic fame, named Liston, as "Hamlet." This, again, was one of the joys of Fallington's life—to be seen by a brilliantly-filled house enacting the cavalier to two of

the most beautiful girls and the most stylish woman of the season.

But one man's Heaven was another's Hades. The pit to poor Pierce on that evening was a veritable pit of Acheron, for, as ill-luck would have it, 'twas the same memorable night when O'Sullivan had got him into that sudden brawl, and just as Caroline entered the box with her party, the *mêlée* was at its fiercest. She recognised Pierce instantly as a prominent actor in what seemed to her eyes a most disgraceful scene, and perhaps a man never looks to greater disadvantage than in the heat and passion of a wild row.

Pierce, unfortunately, even in the midst of this absurd combat, saw Caroline enter, and knew that he had been seen.

Caroline was intensely mortified to think that one she looked on as a *preux chevalier*

as gentle as brave, should thus have demeaned himself in public, and her mortification slowly changed to anger as she brooded over the matter, making her very ungracious to Fallington, and the few friends he brought to present to the ladies.

The play, too, was a lamentable failure, for poor Liston, who had been most oddly consumed with an ambition to shine in tragedy, was so preposterously, dismally-ridiculous in the part of "Hamlet," that the audience began to titter in various parts of the house, and as the comic, melancholic countenance began to play with involuntary grimace at the "Poor Yorick" soliloquy, the tittering spread and spread until it culminated in a roar of laughter.

Mrs. Siddons, in a mistaken kindness, had been over-persuaded to give the young aspirant a chance, but, at the conclusion of

the play (although, of course, greatly annoyed), she could hardly keep her own countenance whilst saying, in her grand, tragic manner—

"Young man, never play tragedy more! Your *forte* is comedy!"

And "comedy" it was, indeed, of the richest kind, as the tens of thousands who, since those days, saw that same Liston in "Paul Pry," will amply remember.

An eventful evening this, both before and behind the curtain; a great artist had made a great mistake in his vocation. Pierce had made a greater mistake in a friend, and was himself most cruelly mistaken in turn by Caroline.

CHAPTER V.

CAROLINE pleaded headache next morning, and kept her room till late in the day, commenting bitterly on the events of yesterday evening, and alternately upbraiding and excusing Pierce.

"Can he," she thought "have sunk into a mere reckless reveller, a half-tipsy brawler? he whom I remember (ah, too well) as the gentlest, kindest of all our friends, with a power of self-restraint and self-command that no aggravation could move—can this be?

"Poor fellow! how dull his life must be, and what a hopeless will-o'-the-wisp he is chasing. Perhaps he should be excused for

now and then forgetting his hard fate in some kind of excitement! But a vulgar fight in a theatre, where every one would see and recognise him. Oh, this is too bad! Pierce, Pierce, how could you lower yourself to this?"

If Pierce could have heard this question asked, he could have answered it frankly, and all would have been well, but he had been awkwardly disfigured in the fray; a heavy blow on the lip had caused a grotesque swelling, that gave him an inconvenient likeness to the pig-faced lady who was then the favourite monstrosity in town. Hence, although Mrs. Langdale had given Noulaiton and himself invitations for the musical evening which followed the ball and the play, the unlucky fellow was obliged to send a refusal, and stay (abusing his stars) in his laboratory, whilst *la belle* Caroline was feeling more pes-

tered than ever with Fallington's attentions. She was at last driven to seek a slight relief from his pertinacity by patronising his shadow, young Somerset. Her wit had a good deal of bitterness in it this evening, so she had not the slightest compunction in joining William Langdale in a hearty flagellation of this young shadow of a shade. He was so thickly padded with vanity, that she knew the sharpest lash could only cause a wholesome twinge.

One is sometimes exercised with the question why vapid young fops like this should have a continuous existence in this stern work-a-day world of ours, but here is a glimmer of an answer to the question. They exist as whipping-tops, or as the stuffed dummies that are set up in the likeness of a man on the archery ground, for those who are so minded to shoot at. The beauty of

the otherwise missing link in the creation is manifest in the unconscious grace with which the dummy strikes an attitude, and assumes a perennial simper of self-satisfaction, however hard it may be hit, and maintains the same vacant or haughty stare as one after another of the arrows go "thud, thud" at its heart or its head.

William Langdale, as usual, was intensely droll and quaint; he had a terrible gift for parody, and as the love songs of that day had a good deal of meretricious sentiment in them, they were fair game for his humour in this respect. Mrs. Langdale used to scold him for this, so that it was his custom to find a good and appreciative listener like Caroline, and make running comments—*sotto voce*—upon these gushing songs. He was a born actor, and could have made his fortune on the stage, had it not been already made on

'Change; and the clever mimicry which he could execute in dumb show behind the backs of his unconscious victims was irresistibly comic; hence the evening passed over Caroline's head less heavily than she had feared. Mrs. Langdale had again yielded to Fallington's masterly stratagems, and consented to make up a party on the following evening for Vauxhall, which was then a fashionable resort during the early part of the evening, and did not turn the men into beasts till after midnight. The party was to consist of Mr. and Mrs. Langdale and the two girls; Fallington and Somerset were to dine at their club, and meet them at the entrance to the garden. But we will leave these young rakes for a time to the pleasures of gaiety, and take a passing glance at the quiet life of Wolfern Chace.

CHAPTER VI.

AUGUSTUS AVENEL, the stout, florid flowing orator of our debating club, was the only married man of that set, and as the Yankees would say, he was "very much married" indeed. His better half was, in point of size, nearly his better three-quarters. A stern commanding matron, whose nose, if it had belonged to one of Wellington's officers instead of to Mr. Augustus Avenel's spouse, would have been as satisfactory to that astute commander as it was to Mr. Augustus Avenel himself. Younger men used to speak of her irreverently as the Roman Matron. She affected a some-

what severe classicism in costume, and being gaunt and straight in figure, and guiltless of stays, I am ashamed to say that the old nautical simile of "a purser's shirt on a handspike" was occasionally applied to this large and estimable lady. O'Sullivan, who of course could not even make a simile without making a blunder also, used to say that "she was a man-of-war, and Avenel her tender," and asserted roundly that when they walked out together, she always threw him a tow rope in the shape of a large pocket-handkerchief. The simile was not altogether a bad one, for he was a rounded, tubby, Dutch-built craft, with something of a roll in his gait; whilst she sailed along high out of the water, with a figure-head that would have been invaluable for a fighting frigate. Another of that wild Irishman's assertions was, that whenever Augustus wanted to kiss

his wife, he had to stand on a chair to accomplish that connubial duty. Happily they had the good taste not to walk out together more than was absolutely necessary, and I do not believe O'Sullivan or any one else ever saw the "Tender" salute his "Frigate" in public.

By one of those freaks of Nature, that do sometimes occur in the best regulated families, Mrs. Avenel had inherited the lioness's share of size in hers; for her younger sister was rather *petite*, and very pretty; so different were the two women, that it was a matter of strong doubt with many of us as to whether one or the other had not been changed at nurse. O'Sullivan said both, but we did not seem to see any necessity for that extreme hypothesis. Probably it may have been merely a chance, like the law of primogeniture, that makes

the eldest son a monster, and leaves the younger ones mannikins. Be that as it may, Emily Hardacre was as charmingly feminine as her sister was sternly masculine, and to her attractions it was that Mr. Augustus Avenel owed the immunity from the merciless chaffing he would otherwise have received at our hands. To the fair Emily also was attributable our willingness to stroll out to the genteel (painfully genteel) suburb, and dine with the Frigate in her square dry-dock of a prim villa. This villa, with its two trees in the front garden, standing stiff and starchily on either side of the door (like perpetual mutes waiting for their own funeral), had its parallelogram of a walled-in garden behind, of the exact breadth of the villa itself, and mathematically cut off, like a big ribbon, at three times its breadth. A stuffy little green-yard, rather than a garden, with a few

dishevelled and despondent trees, a mangy grass-plat, and some unwholesome shrubs struggling weakly one against another for an undesirable and joyless existence. Mr. Augustus Avenel was the most gushingly hospitable man (in words) that I ever remember to have known. Meet him in the street, and he would beam all over his fine florid face, until it seemed literally to shine with the oil of gladness, and you yourself would be overwhelmed, and your two hands would be seized with the most touching reproaches that—

"You never come to lunch with me at my chambers. When will you come and dine with us at Grange Villa? What a ceremonious fellow you are. Why do you want asking?" and other tender adjurations to the same effect. Goaded, perchance, into saying you would dine with him next Wednesday,

out would come a pocket-book as big as a baby-portfolio; and with a theatrical start, after consulting it, he would say—

"By Jove, how unlucky—have to read a paper at the S. A.'s, you know; by the way, I'll send you a card for that evening, and we can fix a day there and then;" then with another, but rather less genial, shake of the hand, away would roll our gushing friend, until he disappeared in the surging, restless crowd of London streets.

But the Roman Matron had taken a grim liking to Pierce, and authoritatively commanded her plump husband to invite that young gentleman to dinner on a certain day with the after-purpose of making a quartett for Vauxhall. Pierce's face was still disfigured, but although he naturally did not care to show himself to Caroline, he had not the slightest compunction in facing the world

in company with the Avenels, and truth to say, in his present doleful condition, he was not sorry for the change of thought that a little mild and harmless flirtation with the fair Emily would afford ; so the little dinner came off, and that young lady was most piquantly and charmingly dressed for the occasion. 'Twas a pity that this could not be predicated of the dinner, also; which consisted of gravy soup, *à la* dishwater, well-peppered; brill, *à la* turbot, with a truly ancient and fish-like smell; a venerable old hen (done to death by murderous hands), and a saddle of mutton, which by its elastic toughness suggested riding rather than eating.

The lady of the house did fair justice to the previous viands, but her *pièce de resistance* was evidently a vast globular plum-pudding of solid and substantial structure; for this she displayed quite a mathematical appetite,

and after assisting those who cared to participate in the delicacy, she sate at the head of her table abstractedly cutting off slices and conveying them to her plate (*en route* for her mouth) as if she were attempting to solve the difficult problems of squaring the circle or extracting the cube root.

But, through all the courses, the florid host glowed and shone with more oil of gladness than ever, and frequently led back the conversation to the choice vintages of his (unmitigated old gooseberry) champagne, his dry sherry (from the cask of a neighbouring publican, and sinner), and his "comet" port from the same suburban tap. In a fit of fervent enthusiasm as to this last wine, he was rash enough to have it in in the black bottle, and make a great display about decanting it himself. Now, although the worthy Boniface round the corner (knowing his cue) had

drawn it into a well-cobwebbed bottle, and put an old deep-coloured cork in it, the little ruse was defeated after all ; for on the cork being drawn with due care and ceremony, a perky, cheerful, little house-fly jumped merrily out of the neck of the bottle, doubtless rejoicing greatly at its regained liberty. Poor Avenel was staggered for a few minutes, but speedily regained his presence of mind, and held forth upon the possibilities of spontaneous generation, development of ova, &c., &c., in the elaboration of which ingenius theories Pierce, of course, assisted, and "out-Heroded" him.

But anon coffee, and then the greengrocer's fly, with the red-nosed, shabby-genteel coachman, in white Berlin gloves and rusty hat, was announced by the hot and flustered maid-servant, and away went the Avenels in grand style to Vauxhall. Of course destiny decrees

that when it is most undesirable for lovers to meet, they *do* meet, and hence it was equally of course, that in the throng Pierce and Emily were separated (not, perhaps, altogether unwillingly) from the Avenels, and that at the moment when Caroline and her party met these two imprudent young people, the lady was in rather a pretty terror at the crowd, and Mr. Pierce was earnestly reassuring her, and smiling at her fears.

It would be an insult to your understanding to attempt to portray in words poor Caroline's feelings at this encounter, or Pierce's wild mortification at the flashing glance of her sorrowful eyes. Given the two lovers and this circumstance, and the whole problem resolves itself into one of those inexorable Rule-of-Three sums of which "X" is the product; meaning an "unknown quantity" of misery.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW hideous glare and noise and buffoonery seem when the heart is aching with a great sorrow. How hollow and empty the shallow laughter of the men and women amongst whom one is thrown in a place of public entertainment. Entertainment! the very word jars upon the ear as if uttered by a mocking fiend. That coarse, loud band; those wretchedly bedaubed clowns and inane pantaloon; that tin-crowned king and queen in tawdry finery; those wretched actors shamming a ghastly merriment, or tearing passion to tatters; this an "entertainment"? These gritty walks

and dust-smothered trees; gew-gaw lamps diffusing everywhere a bad light and a worse odour; snaky rockets rushing to their own extinction; these brutalized men and painted, foul-mouthed women—is it from such a medley of hideousness, noise and confusion that one can expect entertainment? No! but when a man is desperate, it is sometimes in such places that, for his passing frenzy, he finds a passing relief.

Caroline and her party of course retired very early from the gardens and returned to one of those charmingly bright little suppers at Langdale House for which the lady of that house was so celebrated; but Pierce, after seeing Emily to the Avenel's carriage, returned to the gardens, feeling that it would be equally impossible to make himself even decently agreeable to that young lady, or to go to his own home with

any likelihood of sleep. He had the painful consciousness that for the last two hours he had uttered the most incoherent rubbish, alternated with fits of gloomy and distrait silence; and the restraint of having this fair young girl hanging on his arm during that time had well-nigh driven him crazy. He saw Caroline's eyes everywhere, and fancied that she and Fallington were dogging his footsteps wherever he went. With this insane notion growing steadily upon him, he would ever and anon turn fiercely round upon whoever chanced to be behind, until poor Emily was at last really, and with good cause terrified at the prospect of a quarrel. She was, for once, heartily glad to find her sister and brother-in-law once more, and meekly suggested that she was very tired, and would be glad to go home; but the stern Roman Matron pooh-poohed the idea of anybody

being tired, and evidently meant that the gentlemen should propose a supper in one of those gaudy, blotchily-painted boxes sacred to lobster-salad, miraculous ham, and headachy punch. Alas, poor Pierce! his cup of misery was as full as his bowl of punch, for the Langdale party, on their retreat, passed by the open den where he and the Avenels were thus supping in public. Fallington honoured him with a haughty nod (which Pierce did not see). Somerset took a long vacuous stare at Emily through his eyeglass; Mildred and Mrs. Langdale could neither of them repress a smile at the Roman Matron and her rotund spouse, and William Langdale did not try; but accompanied his recognition of Pierce with a gigantic grin. Caroline flushed angrily, and looked away, but not before her eyes had again hastily flashed scorn at him. He felt his own face

flush in turn, and then go as suddenly deadly pale—but, with a strong effort, he broke into a painful laugh, and forced up to the surface a spasmodic merriment that was painful to witness. Poor Emily, who, I incline to think, had had a growing kindness for Pierce, was thoroughly disabused and affronted, and even the Roman Matron was conscious of a vague sense of offended dignity, and haughtily vetoed the proposition for another bowl of punch. Left therefore to himself, was it to be won dered at that Pierce, like an uneasy spirit, wandered vaguely and cynically amidst the crowds of noisy roysterers, now made noisier by the "fast" men from the closing theatres—a veritable Mephistophelian striving to smother and forget his own self-scorn in a more bitter, mocking scorn of man.

Does the Fiend really endow those who accept his hideous creed of hatred and contempt

with a supernatural vision whilst under his influence ? or did Pierce merely imagine that he could at a glance dive into the inmost thoughts and ruling passions of the groups of revellers as he wandered like a ghost amongst them ? Certain it was, he seemed to himself to know as vividly what was passing in their minds as if death or the devil had suddenly unmasked them. Ghouls, satyrs, fauns and wanton nymphs howled and grinned, danced and leered around him, until the solid earth seemed to reel, and the very air grew foul and stifling ; a burning thirst seized him, and he drank recklessly of some liquid, he neither knew nor cared what; for a time this intensified still more vividly the morbid insight from which he was suffering, and the faces around seemed so sharp and distinct in their varied hideousness, that for years afterwards they haunted him in his

dreams; but at last, just as the pure, cool dawn sent its first sweet holy light to scare away the gibbering ghosts from their fevered night-orgies, faces, forms, groups became blurred and mingled in bewildering confusion, and the sights and sounds of the night faded into an empty silence, through which he was gazing on a scowling, haggard face, bearing a fiendish resemblance to his own. It *was* his own. Mechanically, he had passed away from the gardens with the throng, and regained his still darkened chamber in a waking dream. The light that he held in his wearied hand threw a ghastly upward shadow on the vision of himself, making it look more distorted than it really was. For a long time he gazed at this strange manifestation with the wistful feeling of a sinner probing his own sin; then, yielding to some instinct, slowly raised the light above his head. As he did so, it brought

into view another face; the portrait of his dead mother, who herself had never been more than a vision to him, having died in her full prime and beauty in giving birth to him, her only son. To this lovely vision (with the fervour of a Catholic to his Madonna) it was his daily wont to confess his sins, to vow all his noblest resolutions, and to appeal for help and spiritual mediation.

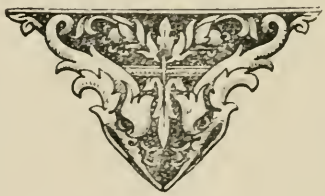
Hence, now, with more than usual power, it worked its gentle, purifying influence on his soul; hatred, contempt, cynicism shrunk away like the other dark things of the night, and left his face marred, indeed, with sadness, and pale and worn with the conflict of passions, but calm and human once more.

Aye, 'tis so, the sainted dead can often redeem us by a look, if we open our hearts to their loving eyes; and can speak to us yet, if we will but hear them. Far over the broad

ocean of eighteen centuries, high above all life, sounds one Voice—

"Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

And thus Pierce Falconer sought and found rest.



CHAPTER VIII.

PIERCE called on me next morning, and, with the innocent frankness of his nature, narrated what I have endeavoured to describe, and thankfully accepted my sincere sympathy and advice in this his first serious sorrow and perplexity. Hitherto, through all the darknesses of his outward career, the splendid light of Hope had cheered him; far off, distant as a star it may be, but still there.

"But now," he exclaimed, with bitter self-reproach, "my double folly does not bear thinking of; a brainless idiot, to go brawling in theatres with a wild Irishman, and then to

cap the climax by philandering at Vauxhall with a girl I do not care two straws about."

"But why," I replied, "why not write or see Caroline, and tell her, as frankly as you have told me, the whole circumstances?"

"Impossible, I have not the slightest right to intrude any explanation of my conduct on Miss Langdale. I am nothing to her; if a word, the merest word, implying the slightest engagement, had passed between us, I might have done so; but, without this, she would be perfectly justified in receiving any such excuses with a 'Really, Mr. Falconer, I must decline to be your confessor,' and she would say it, too, or something twice as cutting. I can just see her proud smile, and the slight, impatient toss of the head with which she would strike me dumb."

"Then there is not even a tacit understanding between you?"

"Not the shadow of a shade. Bad as I am, I was not such a scoundrel as to attempt to win the love of a girl before seeing a chance of placing her in the position she should have."

"You do not believe yourself indifferent to her?"

"Now, do not think me a conceited fool if I say that I believe she would have loved me when I had proved myself worth loving."

"Good; I can give you so much comfort as to say that I fully share your belief, and, moreover, I flatter myself I can help you out of this slough of despond."

"You're a right good friend—but how?"

"Listen; there's to be a grand scientific lunch at the Chace next week; an Hereditary Grand-Duke, who dabbles a little in science and does not dislike champagne, and three or four other serene highnesses of

various degrees of transparency are going down to witness Sir Geoffrey's experiments; he will therefore want some of us to help entertain the ladies, whilst the learned and solemn pundits are convincing themselves that 'what is, is,' and 'what isn't, isn't.' Now, you and I between us can probably manœuvre to have at least a quarter of an hour's word-sparring with the two sisters, and in that I will banter you about your two misadventures, and thus give you an opportunity of explaining, without seeming to explain."

"Excellent; I only hope my presence of mind won't fail me when I get the chance."

"Never say "fail"; if the word is not French it is still less English. But come, you must shake off this doldrumish mood, or we shall think you're going to follow Liston's lead and enact Hamlet."

"Ah! what a mess he made of it that night."

"Not quite so bad as an Irish amateur did once."

"How was that?"

"'Tis one of O'Sullivan's stories, so you must take it *cum grano salis*—but if you have not heard him tell it, 'twill amuse you.

"The ambitious aspirant in question was a certain Mr. Larry O'Rourke, who was blest with a good figure, a flexible voice and a melancholy cast of countenance; with these three qualifications he felt that Destiny had evidently intended him to astound the universe in the part of the Prince of Denmark. In this belief he was sustained and perennially refreshed by the rapturous applause with which his spouting of certain passages were received by his one enthusiastic and admiring friend, Phelim O'More. Phelim's enthusi-

asm, in turn, was also perennially refreshed by copious tumblers of whiskey-punch, for which the magnanimous O'Rourke grandly paid (or ran in debt, which to any Irishman means the same thing). Well, sir, by dint of blarney, bullying and bribery, the two friends at last prevailed on the manager of the Cork Theatre to give this rising genius the opportunity of distinguishing himself for which he had so long thirsted.

"Poor Phelim's patience had nearly got to the end of its tether before the evening arrived, for he was nearly 'Hamleted' to death by his friend's private rehearsals; but at last Mr. O'Rourke had the proud satisfaction of donning the conventional suit of black cotton-velvet and silk tights, the portentous feather, and the 'property' black rapier. Except that this botheration rapier had a nasty trick of getting between his legs and

nearly tumbling him once or twice into his 'Queen mother's' lap, the first part of the performance went off pretty well. There was the beefy, provincial ghost, with a sepulchral voice, and the usual difficulty of disappearing as a ghost ought; whilst a bit of the ramparts well-nigh defied all the efforts of the frantic scene-shifters to dismantle it in time for the next scene; but for O'Rourke himself, he really was not playing the part badly, and Phelim believed firmly that he was excelling Kemble 'all to nothing.'

"That fervent friend had stationed himself in the very middle of the pit to lead the applause, which he did with an energy that reflected great credit on his heart and hands.

"When Hamlet came on in the 'Alas-poor-Yorick" scene, alternately looking down on the skull in his hand, as if it were a

natural curiosity, and anon turning up the whites of his eyes to the drop-scene (according to the exigencies of the passage), Phelim unfortunately espied a strip of white undergarment making itself gradually more and more visible in the mid-region of the prince's attire, somewhere between doublet and hose. Immediately he began to fidget in his seat, and to cough, and ahem, and wink, with the vain hope of catching Hamlet's eye, as it went up and down; but all to no purpose. On went the soliloquy, and little by little the bit of white puckered itself more prominently out of its black casing.

"Phelim half raised himself, and uttered in a deep stage whisper—

"'Larry.'

"Still, on went the soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be.'

"Growing desperate, he stood straight up

in the midst of the pit, and placing a hand to each side of his mouth, gave voice to a 'Larry' that perforce drew not only poor Larry's attention, but that of the whole audience, to the speaker. As soon as he had thus caught his friend's eye, he continued with an energetic and most audible *sotto voce*—

"'There's the laste taste in life of your shirt hanging out!'

"Of course this set the whole house in a roar louder, far, than ever Yorick set the table, and the discomfited prince, with a fine Milesian oath, shied the skull at Phelim and bolted. The skull missed Phelim, but hit a highly irascible compatriot hard by, whereupon the usual free fight ensued; which probably the male part of the audience enjoyed far better than the play."

The story extracted a slight, half-hearted laugh from Pierce, which he tried his best to

make the most of, but I could see the poor fellow was too deeply touched to pass easily into the lighter tone of our accustomed chat, and bethinking me that few things shake off a man's heavy thoughts better than a day with the hounds, I offered him my spare hunter for the morrow's meet of the West Kent pack, to which my brother and myself subscribed.

That "fetched him," as Uncle Sam has taught us to say, and on the morrow early we rode down to Sutton to breakfast. 'Twas a fine, fresh, crisp morning, and a good night's rest had restored my love-sick friend considerably.

We met several parties of our city friends riding in, with grave and sedate faces, to business. As they greeted us, *en passant*, they looked wistfully, at our scarlet and tops, and snow white cords.

Two of them fairly gave way to the strong temptation of playing truant, and turned their horses' heads to ride down to Sutton with us, and perhaps see the throw off afterwards.

One of these—Jack Bishop—was a genial young giant, full of fun and good-tempered mischief; the other, Evan Jones, a "point-device" dandy, and a trifle tempersome, but a right good fellow none the less; the warmth of his heart condoning thoroughly the warmth of his temper.

Jones had been at a ball the night before, and as he seemed more touchy than usual, of course we each had a gird at him as we rode along; one, attributing his touchiness to having been snubbed by the belle of the room; another, to a quarrel with his lady-love; and another, to too much champagne or a lost latch-key.

Whilst breakfast was preparing, our point-device friend reclined elegantly on the fusty old sofa, whilst Bishop lolled and lolloped about the room much like a great Newfoundland puppy, and for lack of something to do, amused himself with occasionally digging Jones in the ribs with his hunting stock.

The latter was in no mood for being teased, and somewhat angrily bade his burly friend "go hang himself," or some other equally polite and incoherent adjuration. But Bishop, having once discovered a really tender place, could not possibly refrain from touching it, until Jones's Welsh blood got too hot for his discretion, and seizing a large mustard pot, full of thinnish mustard, he declared, with considerable energy of language, that if he were touched again he would fling the contents at his persecutor.

"Touched again? of course!" said Bishop,

and equally of course the whole contents of the viscid mass were sent with such good aim that Bishop's broad chest received a yellow *façade*, whilst little rivulets of the turbid stream went meandering down vaguely over his huge legs.

The varying expressions of surprise, anger and mirth that passed over the giant's face were excessively droll, but Jones had risen up with an angry gesture, and we also rose, fearing a scene; but with a broad grin, Bishop seized his friend in a close and fraternal embrace, and thus imprinted on him a facsimile of his own yellow facings. The irresistible fun and good temper with which this *lex talionis* was achieved, nipped the quarrel in the bud, and Jones had the good sense to let all his annoyance explode in the hearty laugh at the ridiculous figures they mutually presented.

Two buxom chambermaids were called in to wash them down as they stood, which task they accomplished with much tittering, and received for their trouble half-a-crown and a kiss, each with equal equanimity. Happily for Pierce, our day afforded one or two other amusing episodes. Of course Bishop and Jones, although not intending to hunt, could not resist the temptation when the view halloo rang in our ears, so away we all went in the exhilarating helter-skelter of the "gone away," and for a few fields kept well together; but poor Bishop overweighted his horse, who judiciously laid him sprawling in his third ditch, and proceeded after the hounds on his own account. The last we saw of Bishop, therefore, was a dismal figure, hopelessly plodding across a deep ploughed field, with about seven pounds of affectionate "mother-earth" clinging to each boot.

Jones's horse, being even more rash than its rider, took an eccentric line of his own through a gap in the pollards, which, while admitting fairly the passage of the quadruped, retained the biped in their strong arms in a painful suspense, suggestive of Absolom.

Pierce caught the horse a few fields off, and hailing a ploughboy, who was standing all agape hard by, said, "Here, boy, take this horse back to yonder wood, and you'll find a smart little gentleman in a green coat, hanging in a tree who'll give you half-a-guinea for your trouble."

We kept well together, and tolerably well forward through the day, for it was a pleasure to me to see with what fine temper and skill Pierce handled my favourite hunter (one that I didn't lend to many men, you may be sure), and how splendidly the horse seemed to understand, and do his best for, his rider in

return. One jump is, perhaps, worth a passing record; 'twas a broad shallow brook, with a double post-and-rail fence on the far side. A large portion of the field funked it, and skirted off right and left, as their fancy led. Some few flew it, at great strain to their horses, and a great many came to grief, and got a ducking. Pierce rode his horse down into the brook (seeing a shingly bottom), and haunched him, with a standing leap, over the double rail, with perfect ease and a very slight expenditure of steel.

Soon after that we came to a check, and were much amused to see one of the old "Characters of the Hunt," a man of immense wealth, but even greater shabbiness, ride quietly up to an old scarecrow in a ploughed field, take off the hat from the stick, examine it carefully, pull off his own hat and examine that critically, and finally end his examination

by putting the scarecrow's hat on his own head, and leaving his own hat on the stick.

After killing our second fox, we rode back through the dusk afternoon with some other men, and dined together at Sutton, where many good rollicking tales of old days were told, and a few hearty songs sung over our punch. Then "boot and saddle," and out we rode into the pleasant crisp air, lighted on our homeward road by a brilliant moon.

Bishop, who had recovered his horse, and amused himself during the remainder of the day with hunting the huntsmen, dined with us, and was returning homeward in our company. The road being wide and clear, we were riding some five or six abreast, and after a quarter-of-an-hour of foot-pace, had just started into a slinging trot. Our burly friend was outside man, and with his full rolling voice was ringing out a few

snatches of an old Jacobite ballad, when his horse made a bad stumble over something on the road side, tried to recover himself, failed, and fell forward with a heavy crash, utterly prone. Poor Bishop, partly unseated by the first stumble and recovery, was thrown, hopelessly, by the final fall. Released from the weight, the horse scrambled on to its legs again, but the man lay motionless. We wheeled round; one man caught the horse, and two or three others leapt from their saddles, and tried to raise our friend, when, to our horror, we found he was dead. Alighting on his head, concussion of the brain had killed him as with lightning flash.

The shock to all, was terrible, but we, who knew the kindly heart that beat beneath that burly form, were stunned with the sudden extinction of its genial light.

His widowed mother's house (where he

chiefly resided) was not far off, and two of our party rode on to break the dreadful news to the poor lady. Alas for her! to be awakened in the dead of night to hear of such an ending for her only son. Oh, Death, grim Death, thou showest thy triumphs o'er thy rival, "Life," with hideous distinctness at such times! Alas, poor lady, too agonised to weep, too stricken to complain, she sate in mute despair, and motioned us to go. As we retired, our comrades brought the lifeless body in, and laid it on a couch; then her grief broke forth in bitter lamentations and wild sobs, and a great darkness fell upon her soul—

Miserere Domine.

* * * * *

There is something inexpressibly painful and startling when a comrade plunges headlong into that awful gulf, out of a gay, blithe-

hearted revel. In battle, in storm and shipwreck, aye, even from the hunting-field, it seems but natural to leap into eternity. The blood is up, the nerves well strung, the heart full of courage, and a man feels almost exultantly defiant of the grim foe; and yet how startling and strange that leap must be—a leap from this strange bewildering dream, that we dignify by the name of "life," to the absolute, irrevocable, never-ending real life to which this world is but the vestibule! A leap out of our passions, our feelings, our temptations, thoughts and actions into the first inevitable "result" of them all.

Some such thoughts and words passed from one to the other as Pierce and I sat late into the night after this eventful day, conversing, in low tones, upon the strangeness of life, and death, and eternity. Pierce, still half-musing, said—

"Does it not seem more wonderful to you that we *are*, rather than that we *shall be?* Is not creation more, infinitely more, like a miracle than a restoration to life? Once possessing "life;" once endowed with the control over mere material things, and acting through and upon matter, the presumption would rather lie in the impossibility of its death than in the difficulty of its renewal after death."

"The sense of this last difficulty pressed so strongly on the minds of the men of the middle-ages that it produced the idea of purgatory."

"I sometimes think many of us unconsciously still hold to that idea of purgatory."

"Not impossible; a belief often outlives its merely formal renunciation."

"Dante perhaps helped to perpetuate it more forcibly than the monks."

"Yes, the poet's religion has a more last-

ing influence than the priest's, because it is more truly Catholic in the widest and noblest sense of that term. There were many grand old divines in the Elizabethan age—but which of them left such a splendid heritage of 'sermons in stones—books in the running brook, and good in everything,' as the poor, and then despised player—Will Shakspeare?"

"Shakspeare evidently believed in purgatory."

"You infer that from the ghost's speech in 'Hamlet,' but I don't think we are quite justified in inferring a poet's own opinions from those he puts into the mouths of his *dramatis personæ*."

"Well, no! upon reflection that would be unfair, and would tend much to curb the essential freedom of poetic utterances. These, in their allowed boldness, sometimes reveal a half-truth, of which after-minds make a per-

fect whole; but, shall I confess, that, however skilfully and kindly you try to lead away my thoughts to lighter themes they will revert to that dread plunge into eternity that we have just seen."

"You would be wiser not to dwell too long on this theme; 'tis almost too great a strain for mortal thought, but if it has taken such strong hold on you, speak your thoughts freely to me; it is better to speak, than to brood on such subjects."

"I would rather ask your thoughts than tell my own. Do you think the *mind* was crushed and extinguished like a torch dashed against the ground, and that it will have to be relighted by the same stupendous power that first created it out of 'nothing?'"

"I do not often dare to indulge myself with such speculations; they are intensely fascinating, but I incline to think dangerous,

as well as useless. It ought to content us to reflect that He, who did create, can re-create, or sustain, as He thinks fit, and it has always seemed to me, that for men to prate about God's doings with their absolute 'can' or 'cannot,' and 'must,' and 'laws,' would be simply ludicrous if it were not also hideously presumptuous."

"I grant you that the utmost we can do as to such questions is to form a mere idea, or opinion—partly based on education and training, and partly on individual feeling—but every man who thinks at all must have his idea, and I desire much to hear yours, and compare it with my own."

"In that view, if you will accept it, simply *quantum valeat*, as the mere nebulous light of imagination, rather than the clear star of reason, I will venture to compare ideas with you."

"Is it needful to hold with Dante and the Romanists the belief in a purgatory, or must we, as the sole alternative, accept the idea of destruction and re-creation of the soul?"

"I do not think we are driven to that dilemma. In profound sleep, which is always dreamless, and which we all enjoy sometimes, no one would be hardy enough to say that the soul is dead; yet it is utterly without conception of time; it has no joy, no sorrow; sees no sun, no moon, no earth, no stars. Those we love with the deepest intensity might die whilst we were in such a sleep, and we should neither know nor mourn—fortune or misfortune might come upon us, and we should neither rejoice nor grieve. Empires might be conquered—cities burnt—navies wrecked—armies destroyed, and we should "care for none of these things." Aye, and there are instances of long trances, out

of which the sleepers awake wholly unconscious of the lapse of time, which might therefore have been ten centuries as easily as ten days."

"One might fairly say so—because the mere destruction of the material fibres of the brain, through which the soul has manifested itself in this world, is no indication that the *soul itself* has perished, any more than if one were to assert that because the harp strings of the musician are worn out or broken, therefore the musician himself is dead, or that the music has ceased to exist."

"I think the parallel a fair one, because even if we conceive the nerves and fibres of the brain to be as fine as a spider's line, still they are but threads after all; and the most wonderful combination of the most delicate threads could not move, or think, or enjoy, or grieve, or feel, or in any way *act* of them-

selves. Even the Æolian harp needs the wind from heaven to waken it into music."

"And some such wind from heaven is the soul of man; a breath from the source of life acting upon these delicate threads and evolving from them all the wondrous and varied music of humanity."

"But now to change my question. Should you (like Hamlet) have a greater shrinking from the idea of an intermediate state of dream, or from the long unconscious sleep? The vagueness and uncertainty of what such dreams might be, must ever (as Shakspeare has so well shown) be terrible shadows, which must give us pause, lest we recklessly rush into that shadowy land; but although there is more *fear* in this idea, there is still more *awe* in that of the unconscious sleep."

"I do not think I can hold with you there. Recollect what unconscious sleep involves,

the annihilation of Time between the last slumber and the awakening. Return (in thought) to the hunting-field of to-day and suppose that either you or I at some rash leap had leapt from life to death; suppose that the few, who may still love us, had shed their tears for us, and in the course of years utterly forgotten us; and they also die, and their children and their children's children pass over the stage of the world for countless generations—tens of thousands of years; yet to you or me, when the awakening comes, it would have seemed but like to-morrow's morning; possibly even more instantaneous still."

"It would indeed be a wide leap and a swift."

"To pass thus, without conscious interval, from the trivialities of this existence, into the tremendous and henceforth eternal verities

of the Future, cannot but inspire men with awe; but awe is a noble emotion, fear, a mean one. The soul *crouches in fear* before the idea of a purgatory, but *stands in awe* of heaven."

"True; hence my belief that it is wiser to encourage ourselves with the higher motive of action, rather than scare ourselves with the lower."

"This is a calming thought to sleep upon, whether it be true or no, and so good-night."

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER the events and the conversation related in the last chapter, Pierce seemed to have acquired a more earnest, and yet more calm, tone of character. The previously all-absorbing passion of his life was less feverish and disturbing, and his self-assumed career was followed with more patience and stability of purpose, and with fewer wild breaks of impatient reaction.

On the appointed day we rode down together to Wolfern Chace, to the scientific lunch which to us young folk was a dull affair enough. Foreseeing that it would be so, Sir Geoffrey had only invited Fallington and ourselves to

make up a little coterie in the afternoon with Gilbert and his sisters, whilst the learned celebrities were busy in the laboratory or the fields.

Caroline treated poor Pierce very coldly and haughtily, but I used all my diplomacy, and taking Gilbert and Mildred into my confidence, these two entrapped Fallington for archery, whilst I prevailed on Caroline to let Pierce and myself take her for a row on the lake. There and then "oaring" our little boat lazily along from islet to islet, enjoying the delicious air, the restful gliding motion, and the ever-varying points of view, I led the conversation to the recent visit to London, and made Caroline describe all the doings there, as already related. I noticed that she passed swiftly over with a slight flush and a frown my questions as to Hamlet and Vauxhall, but dwelt long and

pleasedly on the brightness and perfection of the arrangements at the Guards' ball. Whereupon Mr. Pierce took upon himself to flush and lower his brows in turn, and began to pull at his oars so vigorously, that our light craft flew into the middle of the lake. Caroline's great Newfoundland dog, which had been alternately paddling after us, and ranging the islands after birds and rabbits, was left a long way behind; hence, pretending great solicitude about this shaggy monster, I called out to Pierce to rest on his oars, and took advantage of the pause to banter him about his wild Irish friend O'Sullivan, and the pretty Miss Hardacre. This gave him the opportunity of explaining away both the delinquencies, which he did in so simple and straightforward a manner, that no one could have disbelieved him if they had tried. Caroline did not try. I

could see the firm-set little mouth gradually parting into a forgiving smile; the slightly contracted, troubled brow, smoothing over, like the fair calmness of the lake when the rippling wind has ceased; the eyes softening down, and the wholesome flush of pleasure replacing the hot and intermittent one of anger. This was simply delicious, but desperately dangerous for Pierce. I think if I had been he, come what might, I must have flung myself at her feet in the boat, and poured out all my passionate love in maddest words; but, like a noble fellow, he gripped his oars hard, set his teeth together, and only looked one long deep look, full of the most ardent love and wistful tenderness; and then, with a sigh, as if awakening from a glorious dream, again sent the boat along until the water foamed from her bows. The dog had nearly reached us, and now, when

we went forward, sent up a moan of disappointment at being once more left behind; whereupon Pierce paused till the brute could catch us up; it had no sooner done so than fearing, I suppose, to be again deserted, it laid its great paws on the side of our little cockleshell, and in endeavouring to leap in, capsized it and turned us all into the water. I could not swim a stroke, but in desperation clung to the boat when I rose, and after some struggling, managed to clamber on to it, and sit astride, heartily thankful, for once, for even a wooden horse without legs.

Caroline's dress of course so cumbered her, that she was just sinking, but Pierce struck out the instant he saw where she was, and entreating her not to lose courage, sustained her head above water with one hand, whilst striking out with the other. She behaved splendidly; no screaming, no deadly

convulsive grasping, but holding her rescuer lightly with one little hand, and striking out, as best she could, with the other, they were enabled to oar themselves along slowly toward the nearest point of land. This they would have reached with comparatively little danger, but that the brute of a dog, far from being of any use, impeded them in every possible way. Pierce tried to grasp him once or twice to make him help to bear them up, and along, but cumbered as he was, the man was no match for the beast, which easily eluded him, and swimming after his mistress, repeatedly seized her floating dress with his teeth, so as to drag her back. I watched the struggle, in an agony of wretched helplessness, for my reiterated halloas brought no one to their assistance.

I could have slain that stupid brute of a dog a thousand times over; but at last, to

my infinite relief, I saw Pierce had touched the ground, and in a few seconds more, I saw him take the now fainting girl in his strong arms, and bear her gently to the land. The safety of my two dear friends being thus assured, I began to reflect on the combined absurdity and danger of my own position, for a wind had sprung up, and my wooden horse was beginning to roll in his trot in a peculiarly uncomfortable manner, and was drifting alas! farther and farther away from the land. My hands and legs were much cramped and my voice so hoarse with useless shouting, that I could not croak much louder than an athletic frog. I watched, therefore, with by no means an unselfish interest, for the signs of returning animation in the lady, well knowing that Pierce would not think of, or care for, the dearest friend in life until Caroline was in assured safety.

The suspense seemed long, but at last the dear girl opened her eyes, and although I dare swear the first use she made of them was to look speechless thanks at her deliverer, the second was to see my peril, and I observed, by a gesture of her arm, that she was pointing me out to him, and entreating him to go to my rescue also. I quite forgive him for wishing me at the bottom of the lake, just at that supreme height of delicious happiness. I taxed him with that wish afterwards, and he evaded rather than denied it; but whatever his wishes, his acts, were those of a staunch friend, as well as a true lover; for, spent and exhausted as he was, he ran along the shore till he found another boat, and pulling out to the wreck, rescued the salvage.

He was glad enough to resign the oars to me for our homeward voyage, and I made

what little reparation I could by sending the boat along to where Caroline was watching for *us* of course not *him*, as fast as my cramped arms could move.

The meeting again of these two, as we leapt ashore, was charming to see, for in that eventful moment of revival from the mimic death, after the escape from the actual, the lightning flash of avowed and accepted love had sped upon the whispered word from heart to heart and found its echo; and then and there, for these two noble young hearts, no harping of angels on golden harps would have been music to compare to those soft half-articulate tones; no spot on earth so fair as the wooded margin of that lake, no air of "Arcady the blest" so delicious, no water so sparkling, no sky so blue, no sun so glorious as that which illumed all things with a rapturous and excelling beauty!

Poor dupes! for some short space, the enchanter, "Love," led them hand-in-hand through the garden of Eden, and I?—I simply felt myself like the old serpent, condemned to whisper in the ear of Eve's daughters that their destiny is to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and to know thereby both good and evil things.

Not that I by any means enacted that part at that time; on the contrary, I rejoiced in their joy, and would have given half my life to make that joy longer for them. I sent them on to the house, and pulled out again to fetch the other boat; and saved up my serpentine and disagreeable wisdom for another generation, not caring to burden my own with it. I watched them musingly as they wandered slowly away through their fast fleeting Paradise, and vaguely wondered if a like glimpse of

"Heaven on Earth" would ever be vouchsafed to me.

Caroline was still weak, and evidently required the support of Pierce's arm round her waist; they often stopped and turned, pretending (the dissemblers) that they were waiting for me to join them. Thus standing, they themselves gave the beauty of young life and love to the already exquisite beauty of that sylvan scene—a scene of wood and lake, and of waving fields of green and golden harvests. The sun was declining, and its dazzling whiteness was beginning to break itself up into gorgeous colours, and to fling rubies and amethysts broadcast over the cloud-islets of the sea of air adorning them thus with orient gems and gold—the first breathings of the dewy air of evening were just perceptible to the senses, descending with the cool freshness so reviving and delicious

after summer heats; distant music floated like an audible fragrance from the gardens, alternated with occasional splashes of merrily-rung bells from the distant Abbey.

The great columns and stems of the forest trees were touched with the spears of light, and shone like burnished gold—whilst other spears and arrows flew far and wide over the fields on to the dark masses of the forest on the horizon, and seemed to set it ablaze with brilliant but unconsuming fire; aye, even the great prosaic hawthorn bushes seemed dazzlingly alight with the glory of the descending god of day, recalling vididly to the mind that wondrous Bible-scene, when the great leader of Israel hid his face, and listened to the awful voice.

The path from the lake, up which they were slowly ascending, faced the west, and thus the all-vivifying light shone upon them as ever

and anon they turned—with their young hearts newly opened by love, to that other inner light; the sweetest light possible to us poor mortals.

Such a sunshine and so fair a scene seemed at once an augury and a foretaste of the higher joys of Heaven. 'Tis pity these bright dreams must be followed by nightmares; or vanish at the cloudy dawn of a rough matter-of-fact day of cold stern realities!

I joined them as they passed into the gardens from the fields, and we all entered the house together. Great was the consternation, but greater still the joy of Sir Geoffrey and Lady Langdale, when our little adventure was told, and a fervent "God bless you, Pierce" came fresh from the hearts of both when they heard how manfully he had saved their loved Caroline. She retired to change her dress and to rest awhile after the strain

and fatigue, and Pierce was strongly urged to change his wet clothes also, but declaring that they were now nearly dry, and that he had often been far wetter in a day's hunting, he pooh-poohed the idea of any ill consequences from this escapade. With a grace alike simple and sincere, he deprecated the praises and thanks lavished on his part in the matter, asserting (what was indeed most true) that Caroline had shown far more heroism than himself, for if she had yielded to the quick, womanly impulse of blind fear, they must, undoubtedly, both have been drowned.

The Serenities and Savants had departed some time ago, so when Caroline was rested, Mildred, Fallington and Gilbert were summoned from the drawing-room, where they had been passing the time with music and chat, and we sat down, a little party of eight, to a late dinner, or rather supper, after which

Pierce and I mounted our horses, and rode slowly and reluctantly away, lighted on our track by a lovely moon. The younger people, tempted by this moonlight, walked across the park with us, and "one," when we parted, lingered for as long as we could see, on the brow of the hill that commanded a view of our downward road into the valley. To Pierce's imagination, that "one" was the angel of the moonlight, from whose sight he was stooping into a "deep tremendous sea of cloud." For from the valley a silvery white mist had climbed nearly half way up the hill, and after a last regretful wave of the hand, we vanished into it as if we were indeed, this time, hopelessly drowned.

On our homeward ride, Pierce confided to me wholly and frankly all that I had in great measure surmised; now breaking out into irrepressible joy and exultation at having

won the love of such an angel; anon giving way to fits of gloomy despair and bitter self-reproach at having dared to think of dragging her down to be the wife of a beggar.

"But trust me, old friend," said he. "I'm not such a beast as even to think of that; I don't think she cares for rank or wealth, or she would have married that fool, Fallington, long ago; yet if I cannot win a fair position in life for her, I'll resign her, even if it kills me to do so."

"And *her* fate?" I enquired.

"Ah, there's the rub! What selfish brutes men are at their best."

"Speak for yourself, sir," I retorted.

"Well, I am speaking for myself" he rejoined. "I was only thinking of *my* life. What is my life compared to hers—aye, or compared to a day's unhappiness for her? Look now—this life of mine, about which I

prate, has been twice saved—twice, as it were, given back to me; snatched by a merciful Providence from the jaws of death, and yet I would hold it in my hand and fling it away for ever, if thus I could avert trouble or sorrow from her sweet face."

"Don't talk nonsense, Pierce; if you want to avert sorrow from La Belle Caroline, keep your life, man, wield it well and nobly and to good purpose; strain well at your oar; the tides have been against you, I grant, but happily, the tides have a pleasant knack of turning, and sometimes a good deal sooner than we looked for; besides, remember, your life is not your own, it is only a gift in trust to man; it may, it must, be freely perilled in a great cause, but never flung away in a small one."

"What cause could be greater or nobler than to save one you loved from sorrow?"

"But I tell you to risk it now; carelessly or foolishly to waste it, would bring sorrow, not avert it."

"Well, well, I must make the best of it, I suppose; but this slow plodding after some Will-o'-the-wisp, which I had begun rather to like, seems now simply maddening and intolerable."

"Why, what better career could you have, and in what other so good a chance of rapid fame and wealth?

Ah, that's what Noulaiton preaches; he, with his eloquent hopefulness and sanguine second-sight, is constantly casting anchor far ahead of our age, and shadowing forth some dreamy possibility on the horizon; but I yearn for something near and tangible to grapple with, and win. Whilst love was but a mere vision I was content to pursue a visionary fortune, but

now that love is a reality, I must make fortune a reality also, lest I lose both."

"You must take Time by the forelock, then, and compel him to work with you. By the way, why did you let him slip by you this evening without asking Sir Geoffrey's consent? You could not have had a more favourable time for this all-important question."

"Do not laugh at me for a chivalric fool. I was as conscious as you could be that, having just saved his daughter's life, I could not have had a better chance of assent to my suit, but that very fact sealed my lips. There seemed something mean in any attempt to take advantage of a sudden impulse of gratitude."

"Good boy! I'm half ashamed that I overlooked that view of the case."

"Oh, I dare say I'm over scrupulous; the poor are always proud, but I don't think

it's all mere pride of poverty either. The love of a noble girl like that seems to have given me a sudden inspiration of nobleness in my own nature. I should hate myself more than ever if any temptation led me to do a mean, or even a mere cunningly politic action."

"Right! hold by that! Real love exalts the nature, as much as false love debases it."

"Aye, and what coarse brutes we should be if it did not; the influence of a sensitively delicate and pure-minded woman must banish all grossness from our hearts, and awaken within us the half-dulled and half-dormant sense of honour to its finest issues."

"Shall we admit that that influence comes upon us like a second conscience when the first is getting a little the worse for wear?"

"Yes; but the second conscience is the stronger of the two."

"What, because it comes armed with a pair of bright eyes that look into our own, and read us off as if we were a book?"

"By heaven, I think they do! and then, think, those eyes will, indeed, at some time (who knows how soon?) see us, not as we seem, but as we are; when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, when all our thoughts, as well as all our deeds, are revealed; will they then have to close those eyes in pity and contempt, or change their sweet looks of love, and trustful innocent confidence, into horror and aversion?"

"Heaven forfend! What a fall were there for our lordly vanity! I hold that whatever a man is, that he should be content to seem; rather let him feign to be worse, than better, if he needs must feign at all."

"He should not feign that way either—there is nothing bores either men or women

so egregiously as a super-sensitive self-depreciation; to use a musical pun, one should play neither B sharp nor B flat, but stick to B natural. Still, if there must be the alternative, I believe in the minor key rather than the major."

"Yes, that's all very well when you have once struck the key-note, (as you have to-day, Mr. Pierce), but beforehand? What do you say to Byron's aphorism—'Brisk confidence still pleases woman best.' He wrote it 'impudence' at first, and acted upon it pretty freely, but it appears to have lost him his wife, and provided him with some decidedly dubious celebrities in her place."

"Or Wilkes' brag that he could win any woman in the world by his talk."

"Which with him is synonymous with impudence; but there are women, and *women*, sir, and rest assured, the men who scoff so

glibly at the sex have taken their knowledge of it from the little cliques of demi-reps and frivolities with whom they live, and move, and have their being."

"Why, yes; they are not usually the kind of men to whom a prudent head of a family would open his house, or a pure girl her heart."

"Hence, being shut out of Paradise, they revenge themselves by calling Eve's daughters bad names."

"And helping them to deserve those names to the worst of their power."

"Which, happily, is not much, after all; a fashionable wickedness crops up from the wild oats they amuse themselves with sowing, but even if it 'cometh up as a flower' it is soon cut down like a weed, and ends its career on some congenial dungheap."

"All foulness and *grossierté* have the ele-

ments of decay in their very nature, just as strongly as all purity and nobleness have an inherited and deathless life—Milton and Shakspeare live for ever, but where are the foul-mouthed authors, the brilliant Wickednesses, who scoffed at the blind Bard in his poverty and disgrace? And where even the literary stars, Beaumont and Fletcher, Wycherly and Congreve, who seemed for a time to eclipse the grand Master himself?"

"Why, relegated to the shelves of a few toothless old libertines, who vainly imagine they can conjure back the hot passions of youth by their aid!"

"Still, those old dramatists were grand fellows, and 'tis a pity they cannot be more widely read."

"I sometimes think we of this age are becoming a little too mealy-mouthed, and assuming a prudery, whose real origin is in

a too sensitive knowledge of impurity. As a youngster, I read Shakspeare, Defoe, Cervantes, Swift, with the most perfect unconsciousness of all the very "fie-for-shame" words; and at our early reading-parties, in our own home, we all instinctively avoided the grosser passages, or dashed through them at racing speed, so as to leave no trace of them on any of our minds. Oddly enough, my sisters were first put to the blush about them by an exceedingly proper and precise old maid, who asked in *sotto voce* horror, "how they were going to read such and such a passage in the play of the evening?"

"Just so, and once their eyes being opened to the sense of impropriety, it was of course good-bye to all pleasure in such reading for ever."

"Precisely, when Eve tastes the apple, adieu to the innocence of Eden!"

"Shall I confess to you that 'twas the delicious "innocence" of my darling Caroline that first enchained me to her with such irresistible power?"

"Indeed both the sisters have that most wonderful combination of brilliance and purity that makes them diamonds of the first water."

"Now humour me by letting me come back to the thoughts nearest my heart, and advise how I shall act in this matter."

"Shall you see or write to Sir Geoffrey, on the subject?"

"I hardly know. I think it is better taste to write, though it would be far pleasanter to urge one's arguments in speech."

"Why not do both, dear boy? Write,—and follow your letter down, so as to urge its points by word of mouth."

"Good! I'll do it."

Soon after we had arrived at this point

of our conversation we suddenly emerged from the thin light haze, and the red glare of the great city rose on our horizon; as we rode on, the large old-fashioned country houses, sparsely scattered here and there, and standing far back from the road, gradually gave place to trim little villas, very spick and span with white stucco and green paint, looking as if they had been built wholesale by the dozen, and stuck up afterwards in their little measured bits of garden-ground. The great silvery moon vainly tried to shed its glamour over these trim little boxes. Even in that calm light their two trees a-piece stuck up their heads with a perkety air, as much as to say, "look at us, we are real trees, we are; with real leaves on us, too; though you wouldn't think it; we're so proper and so well pruned, and so very tidy and respectable." "Ah!" but the little

square lawns replied—"Look at us, too; we were clean-shaved this morning, and had our short hair combed and brushed as sleekly as the children's indoors."

But the trim villas and lawns also floated past us, and we came to long lines of dingy houses, with melancholy windows in them like blank sightless eyes, closed with grimy shutters below, and ghastly white blinds above. The idea that we were riding into and through a city of the dead was dispelled by a few tipsy brawlers, reeling home from their feverish and unwholesome carousals, looking fearfully incongruous beings beneath the light of that calm and holy moon; methought a slight red flush, as of shame, seemed to tinge its rays as they fell upon their bleared and besotted faces.

"Oh, wretched beings," it might say, "born in the image of God, how have ye

dared to deface that glorious image! Even as I, a poor dark globe, receive and reflect the blessed light of the sun, so might ye have received and reflected the still more glorious light of an immortal spirit; and now what are ye? the sport of demons spurring ye to hell."

"Rather strong language for our calm friend, the moon," said Pierce, drily.

"It wouldn't be amiss for the reelers to hear such words occasionally, 'twould sober them with a vengeance, if our calm friend could tell them what it sees them do with a voice as round and as full as itself."

"Ah, what a history of the world the man-in-the-moon could write."

"Especially of the love-making that has gone on in it, eh? Mr. Pierce."

"Well, yes; if, as the old song says, ''tis love that makes the world go round,' our

bright friend aloft must have seen a good deal of that kind of thing in its time; but none of mine."

"Humph! but it may do, in future."

"I hope so; but look at that grand old dome of St. Paul's, how it rears itself up, as if proud to carry its cross high into the air and show it to the stars, as the noblest emblem of earth."

"And well may it be proud. What higher emblem of the noble possibilities of life has earth to show than that? 'Twas a quaint idea of some one's (perhaps my own) that the spires of our churches are like God's finger-posts, pointing our upward way to heaven; and I have another quaint fancy that our souls may climb up to these points to take their final flight from earth. There's one old church in the city with an arched doorway surmounting its highest tower, and in my

childish days, when fancy was vivid, I could almost believe I saw the glorious, transfigured forms issuing out and spreading their wings for that final flight."

"Tell me where was Fancy bred?" said Pierce, ironically.

"Well, probably from indigestion, caused by too much plum-pudding and mince-pie," I humbly confessed. "You know there was a poet or a painter, I forget which, who used systematically to eat heavily of roast pork in order to dream weird dreams. A good many of our present writers assuredly follow the same regimen, if we may judge them by their works."

"Some seem to vary the diet with goats' flesh rather extensively."

"Yes, and others with asses-milk-and-water."

"Come, come, that's too severe; have you been 'braying lately?'"

"No, my last exploit was to bray a fool in a mortar, in other words to review a sham poet."

"Ah, that's better fun than being brayed oneself."

"Yes, it is astonishing with what cheerful equanimity we can acknowledge the faults of others."

"Not so easy to acknowledge their merits, eh?"

"Why, no; you see another man's merit in some degree detracts from one's own, and a very big poet or painter ceases to be so very big, when another nearly as big comes near him."

"So like a politic monarch he pats the really little men on the back, knowing he has nothing to fear from them; but does his best to frown down, and ignore those who come up to his shoulders, lest they finally outgrow him."

"Exactly, 'tis simply the law of self-preservation."

"Meaning the preservation of all the best things for oneself."

"Precisely what you have done in the case of Miss Caroline Langdale. Eh, Pierce?"

"Ah, dear boy, 'there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip,' and many a long year I fear before my lips may touch that cup of nectar."

"Oh, never fear, 'faint heart never won fair lady.'"

"But there's a dismal proverb traverses that—'hope deferred maketh the heart sick.'"

"Yes, but that's a bad "proverb for acting;" and happily here we are at my old house, with trusty old Joe ready as usual to take our horses. You'll stay with me to-night, your room is ready. I told Mrs. Primrose you would come back with me."

"Thanks, I shall be glad, for I shall want your judgment on my letter."

"What a dear good old body that housekeeper of yours looks!"

"Ah! you're right there, Pierce, and she's as good as she looks."

"She's quite a picture in her snow-white cap and apron, and black silk gown, with her silver hair neatly banded back, and her exquisitely clean face, with streaks of healthy red in its wrinkles, like an old ribstone pippin when it begins to shrivel."

"Aye, and do you note what a good forehead and intelligent eyes she has? and yet, sir, that woman can neither read nor write."

"All I can say is that she's the finest specimen of ignorance I ever saw."

"By Jove, Pierce, I'd rather have her witful ignorance than a house-full of the half-learned prigs that the Society for the

confusion of useful Knowledge is producing. Think what a memory the woman must have. Her old husband, Joe, is what she calls a 'schollard,' that is, he can scratch on paper some frightful hieroglyphics which he has the vanity to call words and figures, or as he spells it, 'wirds and figgurs.' In accomplishing this feat, he makes, of course, as many contortions with his tongue, as he is making with his pen, so that the performance is a most ludicrous one to watch. Well, sir, the old body remembers and dictates to him once a week, on a Saturday evening, every distinct item, even down to the 'trehaporth o' trepenny tred o' Monday."

"What on earth is that?"

"Three halfpenny-worth of three halfpenny thread, which, I suppose, is some kind of cotton on reels used in the repair of some recondite garments of her own or her husband's wearing."

"I wish some of us could take up the thread of our memories as deftly."

"Aye, or repair the breaches of Time as easily; but now, come, we must repair our broken rest with sleep."

CHAPTER X.

I DON'T fancy poor Pierce got much sleep, despite his fatiguing watery exploit and our long night ride; or if he did 'twas, as O'Sullivan would say, a "slape of drames," doubtless rayed through with visions of one sweet face, the lovely herald of the joys of hope.

How harsh and detestable is the rough awakening from such dreams, when the great noisy, door-banging, wheel-rolling world jars us awake and "hot water and boots, sir," take the place of the angel-in-Paradise with whom we had been walking.

I wonder, shall we ever drop into such dreams, once for all, and never again be disturbed by the roar of world-work or goaded into hard, brain-weary labours by the stern necessities of eating, drinking, and being clothed and housed?

I believe if Pierce could have been perfectly candid on that morning, he would have confessed to hating the world, with a good honest, hearty hatred that would, have been quite refreshing. He tried his best to be amiable to me (as his host), but I could see there was only one fair creature between the sun and the earth that he really cared one jot about; and he believed that glorious young ideal to be nearly as far above him as the sun itself. His breakfast was a farce; he was only hungry and thirsty for pen and ink, so whilst I leisurely finished my prosaic repast, I suggested the lighter one to my love-sick friend.

Accepting the suggestion, he went to the writing-table and dashed off a dozen lines like a madman, halted, read them, frowned, bit his lips and then his pen, seized the paper and tore it into a thousand fragments. Then he went at it again more steadily, and set the pace more thoughtfully, but warming to his work, his pen again ran away with him, and when he headed back—score and score went the savage pen, obliterating words and lines like a second massacre of the innocents.

"Yes," he exclaimed, looking up ferociously at me, and possibly detecting a smile, "It's all very well for you to sit grinning there over your eggs and chocolate, but what on earth am I to do? I can't say half what I want, and yet can't help saying twice as much as I ought."

"Steady, old fellow, pull yourself together; don't let that pen of yours get the bit in his

teeth. Think first and write afterwards, don't attempt to reverse that natural order of things."

"Ah, 'tisn't easy to think when one feels so deeply. Upon this letter the whole future happiness of my life depends, yet I can't, for the life of me, put together half-a-dozen coherent sentences."

"Don't imagine the form and manner of the letter to be so all-important. I dare say Sir Geoffrey has had half-a-dozen incoherent effusions on the same subject, and will know well enough by this time what an awful mess young men always make of it."

"You're a Job's comforter, any how," retorted Pierce. "Half-a-dozen proposals for my Caroline! How the 'something' do you know that? have you made one yourself?"

"Phew! what a voice full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. No, Mr. Pierce, I

do not speak from personal experience, nor from any exact knowledge; but from a fair logical inference. Given one of the loveliest girls in the county and a certain number of danglers, and I don't think half-a-dozen offers an extravagant calculation."

"I fervently hope all the other offers were 'out,' as we used to say at cricket."

"Well, now take my advice, don't imagine your letter to be of such excruciating importance, write freely; frankly and from your heart more than your head. When we attempt to be supernaturally clever in such matters we are sure to make a muddle."

"All right, here goes; third time all fair."

So the letter got itself written somehow, and thus it ran:—

"Dear Sir Geoffrey,

"You will need all the kindness of your own most kind and generous disposition

to read with patience what I, as a man of honour, must now write. First, then, recal the glad memories of those bright days of your early, happy, prosperous manhood, when earth was changed to heaven by the love of your angel-wife. Remember the exuberant joy—the strain of sweet music that filled your heart with gladness, and then, perhaps, you will not hastily or angrily crush out all possibilities of a like hope for me. With your knowledge of human nature, you may have seen—you must have seen—my love, my overwhelming love for your daughter. From you, from her, from all, I strove my utmost to conceal it, but now, looking back upon the past, I see how often I must have betrayed myself. Never in word—never in intent; and never in word or intent should I have been mean or weak enough to let it appear, but that it rushed to my lips, with an utter-

ance that would not be checked, in the agony of the fear, the seeming certainty, that I had lost her, for ever, in death. In that moment of supreme anguish the world, with all its needs and niceties—its codes of honour and propriety—its wealth, its poverty, and its prudence vanished, and there were but two immortal spirits hovering between life and death with a word unspoken that might unite them for ever—it flashed,—and life returned, and brought love with it.

"Oh, sir, smile at my over-wrought fantasy if you will, but in very truth it seemed to me then, and seems now, that that word drew back her gentle spirit when trembling for the second time on the outer verge of this world; —the first rescue was of the body, the second, —of the soul. And now, sir, in sad and sober earnest, what can I say? I am a gentleman,— and—a beggar. Fear not that I dream for a

moment of a presumption so absurd, a meanness and selfishness so vile as to take my loved one from her fair home, with all its elegant luxuries, to a frowsy lodging in a dingy street. Until I am in a position to offer her a home fit for her acceptance, I ask but leave to hope. Men's fortunes are mainly in their own hands—give me hope, and I have a strong belief in destiny—deny me hope, and I shall curse the fate that denied me death. You thanked me yesterday for the life of your daughter—let me thank you to-day for my own—for life, henceforth, is only possible to me,—with leave to 'hope.'

"Ever your devoted friend,

"PIERCE FALCONER."

"Well, yes, it doesn't read badly," I said, patronisingly, "a little hazy in places, and

somewhat narrowly escaping a sort of blank-verse in others."

"Pshaw," said Pierce.

"But I suppose all men have a weakness for the 'form-poetic' when they are suffering from a violent attack of love."

"You're a brute," growled Pierce.

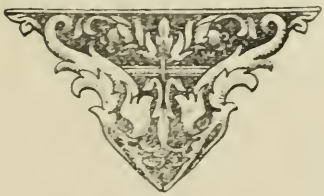
"All right; but now I fancy another kind of brute will be more useful to you. Post your missive at once, and ride down so as to be there an hour after post time to-morrow. The gipsy mare is quite at your service."

"Thanks, old fellow; you don't mind my being a little crabbed, I dare say?"

"Not a bit of it; 'if it pleases *you* it don't hurt *I*,' as the bargee said to his wife when she hit him."

"I wish your gipsy mare could tell me my fortune," mused Pierce.

"Let's hope she will bear you to it; but now good-bye. I've got some letters to write; only not on such a tender subject as yours."



CHAPTER XI.

"IT never rains but it pours," says the proverb, and so Sir Geoffrey found it at Wolfern Chace. Mr. Fallington, finding all his fine speeches and elaborate flatteries quite lost upon Mildred, and being seized with sudden pangs of jealousy at the rescue of Caroline by Pierce, changed his tactics once more, and made a formal proposal to Sir Geoffrey for the hand of the latter, hoping to accomplish by steady siege what he had failed to achieve by irregular skirmishing. Sir Geoffrey was a man of the world and, therefore, could not be wholly indifferent to the prospect of a man of high family

and reputed fortune as a son-in-law, nor to the position it would offer to Caroline. The young gentleman stuttered and stammered over his proposals a good deal, though he had rehearsed his part, and learnt all the words he meant to use very carefully, but he found acting in real life considerably more difficult than private theatricals. Sir Geoffrey, inwardly amused at his difficulties, maliciously gave him no cue to help him through, and when, at the conclusion, he gravely enquired if Caroline had given him any encouragement to make these proposals, or if he had any reason to suppose she would accept him, Fallington was obliged to confess that she had not, and from that moment began to have a disagreeable suspicion that he had made a fool of himself. However, Sir Geoffrey thanked him for his courteous propriety in thus asking his sanction before proposing to

Caroline, and promised to consult with her and Lady Langdale on the subject.

Scarcely had he thus dismissed one suitor when the avant-courier of the other arrived by the post, in the shape of the missive despatched by Pierce.

"What a contrast between the two men, and what a strange pair for my poor girlie to have to choose between," mused Sir Geoffrey, as he read the letter.

From Pierce's hazy note, he did not at the moment glean that Caroline had accepted him, and thus already made her choice. So, seeking Lady Langdale, he first made her smile with his description of Fallington's proposal, and then, with some touch of emotion in his face, handed her Pierce's letter.

There was just the start of a tear in her eyes at the simple-hearted appeal of the poor boy to Sir Geoffrey to recall his own high

noon of love, and in a moment her own thoughts fled back to that time of sunny gladness that can come to us but once in a lifetime. Aye, and however happy and outwardly prosperous the after-years may have been, the memory of those delicious days of "Love's young dream" never fails to call up a sigh for the days that can never come again in their fulness and freshness. But the matron and the mother reasserted themselves as those old memories faded out and she, like Sir Geoffrey, could not but own that the one would be a suitable match for their daughter, and the other—well, alas! almost chimerical. For they knew that Caroline was proud and fastidious, with certain lavishly-extravagant notions which they had rather blamed themselves for not checking. Indeed, they had often rallied her about her sublime indifference to affairs of money and expendi-

ture, and re-christened her by the name of that Bourbon Princess who, when told that the people wanted bread, enquired haughtily why they were not content with buns ? They had wholly under-rated the power of love to change all this by the magic of the three talismanic words, "I love you." Yes ! at this slight spell, (like the transformation scene of a pantomime), the persecuted princess is changed into the agile columbine, the manacled, humble lover into the ever-dexterous and wonder-working harlequin, and away go the gay couple through the bustle and blunders of life, full of joy and happy pranks, to the astonishment of dull-witted clowns, and tottering pantaloons.

And, oh, for such a joyous pair, when once the curtain is up, and the transformation scene entered on, how glad one would be if butchers' trays, and bakers' baskets, and

drapers' stores could be emptied and appropriated without the inexorable necessity (which obtains in real life) of being paid for. What a shame it seems that that airy, gauzy, happy, human butterfly, in white muslin, and roses and smiles; and the lithe, athletic, graceful fellow glittering in gold and coloured spangles, should ever be in imminent peril of being clutched by that stolid policeman, who ought surely to be content with apprehending clowns in general, and the wrong persons in particular; but, alas, when the gas is turned off from that splendid honeymoon, and Mr. and Mrs. Harlequin come back to the three-pair back-room in Stodge Street; then the butchers, and bakers, and candlestick makers become fearful ogres once more, and do the fee-fi-fo-fum business with a grim reality that is very distressing.

Pierce was not quite such a fool as to

imagine that love could survive such a shock as the plunge from a life of quiet, but most luxurious lavishness, to the sordid conditions of genteel beggary. Moreover, he would not have been long troubled with my friendship if he could have endured the idea of being a pensioner on Sir Geoffrey's generosity, alike for himself and his wife; he scouted *that* notion with even greater earnestness than that of dragging his "angel" down into the streets to share his poverty. "Think," he would say, "of the utter negation of a man —the poltroonery, the daily, hourly shame that would come upon him if he had to depend on his wife's father for his wife's scanted needs, and still scantier luxuries? Why, a man had better spur up what little feeling of honour he might still have, and go hang himself on the nearest tree, rather than hang on to a wife thus."

Of course all this was understood by the Langdales, for they had read closely enough the many noble traits in the character of the young fellow, so that 'twas no question of present action, but simply the anxious problem of the best and happiest future for their daughter. No judgment of this could, obviously, be formed without the young lady herself, who was accordingly summoned to the library. Caroline had passed two sleepless nights since the eventful evening of Pierce's departure. She had known long ago that he loved her to distraction, and his reticence had alternately charmed and chafed her. For, "be it known unto all men," that whatever Mr. Pierce Falconer might think or assert, *angels* do not dwell upon this lower sphere; *women* are often a very charming imitation of them, but, if truth must be spoken, they are women

after all, and when a woman sees and knows that a man loves her, it would be highly unnatural if she did not like to hear him say so. Hence, whilst intuitively perceiving the noble motive of his reserve and silence, yet that silence was a small, rankling point, gradually becoming more and more intolerable to her. But now the silence was broken, what was to come of it?

Her first sleeplessness was that of wild, tumultuous thoughts, dazzling, and mostly sunlighted; like roseate clouds driven to and fro over the sky by wayward winds; but the day had brought a clear, almost painfully clear light; hence, by the second night the clouds indeed came again, but they gathered in sombre grey masses on her soul's horizon; then, as the red sun sunk angrily amongst them, it touched them with a fringe of lurid fire, slowly darkening from gloom to gloom,

with the presage of storm in their massive wrinkled brows. For impulsive, impetuous, and (as is the woman's wont), almost longing for self-sacrifice, yet she could not wholly conceal from herself the hopelessness and apparent helplessness of any effort on Pierce's part. It is true she did not shrink with his scorn from the idea that her father might aid them largely; nor did she fail in her faith that ultimately Pierce would win position for himself; but still, the sun was sinking, and though the glorious form of love stood between her and the light, that form cast a long, dark shadow of chilling fear adown the pathway of her life;—and along this pathway she passed into the presence of her father and mother.

Lady Langdale, with the mother's instant insight, saw—

"That Love had passed, with Sorrow in his train."

But Sir Geoffrey, less observant, laughingly rallied her on her two suitors, and suggested that if she had not a preference, she had better draw lots for them, or wait till a third one came into the tourney.

Caroline replied with a blush, but with simple, outspoken frankness—

"I have, indeed, drawn my lot already, dear papa; and, although I know you must think me a very silly girl, I have accepted Pierce."

"Phew; that is rather sudden, is it not, my darling girlie?"

"Of course it must seem so to you, but forgive me. I have known that Pierce has loved me for the last two years, but his sense of honour made him almost avoid me, and not a word of love did he ever suffer to pass his lips; indeed, of late he would scarcely venture even to look at me. I did not, of

course, permit myself to think whether or not I loved him in return; but when death threatened us, the knowledge of my own heart came with a sudden flash, for it told me that his life was dearer to me than my own."

"Ah, dear girl, may you not be deceiving yourself; was it not gratitude assuming the form of love?"

"No, papa, because I have been thinking deeply since of the almost unconscious actions and feelings of the past year, and now see that I must have loved him long before I knew it, or would own it, even in my thoughts."

"But will your love bear the strain of poverty, and a mean and humble position?"

"I think so. You all consider me proud and extravagant, and I know I have been so; but may not this very lot in life have been

fore-appointed to check these faults in me?"

"The check would be too severe, dear Carrie," said Lady Langdale, "and I am afraid you would pass from chafing at your lowered position to chafing at the cause of it."

"I hope not, dear mamma; but were Pierce as wealthy as he is poor, of course I should not dream of anything but a long engagement at present. I love you both too well, and Mildred, and Gilbert, and our dear old home, to want to go away for a long, long time, even if it were to a palace."

Sir Geoffrey.—"But after all, girlie mine, don't you think a palace would be a more suitable place for a princess than a little stucco villa in the suburb of Stick-up-ton?"

"And then, dear," said Lady Langdale, "I do not like long engagements for young people. They are very harassing, and both

health and temper often give way under the constant pressure of the 'hope deferred that maketh the heart grow sick.'"

"Still, mamma, it is better to have hope deferred than crushed."

"Very true; but I must warn you that you will find it very much more trying than you imagine. Don't you think so, Geoffrey?"

"I know it, dear wife—I do not think. I remember that dreadful 'twelve months and a day' before our marriage; it always seemed exactly the twelve months too long."

"Ah, but then you were a man, papa; women are much more patient."

"They pretend to be; they say less, but they feel more."

"Then perhaps you had not such a dear, loved father and mother as I have to help you to be patient."

"Well, I am afraid I must confess that a father and mother don't score for much when a wife is in question; but come, dear child, give yourself a few weeks to think again over this matter; it is one of such terrible import to the remainder of your life on earth, aye, and indeed to your future life also, that it would be rash in the extreme to mistake a passing impulse for a fixed resolve. Pierce, I am sure, is far too honourable to hold you bound by an answer made in a moment of intense emotion and unbounded gratitude."

"I know he is, and hence such a promise is trebly sacred in my eyes."

"Mr. Fallington has many excellent qualities, despite his foppery which your influence would soon banish."

"Those excellent qualities, you must admit, dear papa, are very skilfully concealed,

and perhaps I detest him the more, if he possesses any, for the weakness of allowing his folly to hide them."

"Well, well, child, there are other people in the world besides Pierce Falconer and Mr. Fallington—those two extremes of poverty and riches; hold yourself free for some happy medium—for some one, shall I say like me? Well, if this is too utterly distasteful for you to think of, still pause for a while out of your love for me. Trust me, I will not attempt to control or force any alliance on you against your will; but it is my bounden duty to warn you against committing yourself irrevocably in too great haste."

"You see, dear Carrie," said Lady Langdale, "in any case you admit it must be a long engagement; it would make little difference if you passed through part of the time without a formal engagement at all."

"May it then be understood between papa and you, and me, as really an engagement; only not made known publicly?"

"I have no objection to that," said Sir Geoffrey, "my sole care is, dear daughter, to save you from deceiving either Pierce or yourself. I dare say you think it strange that I should not offer to settle enough on you to keep you both in moderate competence; but I know Pierce too well to believe that he would consent to be a mere pensioner, and I know you too well not to foresee, that even were he to accept such an arrangement, you would despise him for it."

"I would rather live with him in poverty on what he could win for me, than in luxury on what he accepted; indeed, I think in many ways I would rather be a *poor* man's wife than a shabby-genteel one."

"Yes, you would like to play at being poor

for a week or two well enough—even to bake, and cook, and churn, for the fun of the thing, as you used, when a wild young hoyden; but then comes the grimy side of the picture; where is this little play to be acted? Is it to be love in a cottage, or love in a lodging? If the former, I will grant you to have secured the most charming little thatched-roofed, diamond-paned, rose-covered 'little love of a cottage' that you or your sister ever sketched; it shall not be anything like so damp, so dark, so smoky, or stuffy, or full of fleas and gnats as any other cottage in the three kingdoms—it shall have a charming situation on the borders of a forest or park, or on a village green, with a prospect that would delight Birket Foster—and quite an extensive little garden, with a piggery, and a duckery, and a hen-house, and a pond—and Pierce shall work in the garden from four

o'clock to six in the morning, and from six to eight in the evening (always provided that his back is not nearly broken with his twelve hours' labour in between)—I will even grant you that the pigstye and the pond shall not smell very abominably, and that the ducks shall not dabble wet mud over your cottage floor after you have, with extreme fatigue and sore chapped hands, washed it."

"Oh, but we will not have pigs and ducks, then."

"No, I dare say not; nor eggs and bacon either, and yet these latter will constitute the chief luxuries of Mr. and Mrs. Pierce Falconer in their new farce, entitled 'Poverty; or, all for love.'"

"Oh, papa, you are hard upon us—you would surely help us in such straits!"

"Of course I should; but then, that would end the farce, and begin the melodrama."

"Well, let us see if we could not play it out."

"Shall I resume my *granteds?* I have already granted you a great many more things than real life would"

"Yes!"

"I will grant, then, that you shall both enjoy robust health for the first year (I fear I cannot safely extend that grant), that Pierce shall have constant work and good wages, and that you shall gradually get your hands nice and horny inside, and tolerably proof against chaps and chilblains by a chronic condition of beefiness; that your face will be quite safe from any further sunburning or freckling; that your eyelids have not been made very red by the wood-smoke (which always prefers to make its exit by the door and the window rather than the chimney), and that you have not been tormented into

more than temporary insanity by the stings and bites of the small-winged and springed demons that lurk in the thatch and forest, and pond and hen-house. I will grant that Pierce is always cheerful and content with your amateur attempts at cooking, bed-making, wood picking, and marketing. This latter duty will only involve a pleasant trudge of six miles twice a week with an occasional lift in a baker's or butcher's cart (if you're not too proud for an arm round your waist, and a kiss from the driver at the journey's end)."

"No, no, papa! how dare you think of such a thing!"

"No, no, of course not; but then, there's rather a heavy basket of pork or eggs to carry down, and a heavier one with cheese and sugar, and half-a-dozen other delicacies of that kind to bring back, and I'm afraid

those dainty little hands and arms, and that slender waist would have to ache a good deal before they could do this kind of thing comfortably, eh!"

"I'm afraid they would," said Caroline, pensively.

"But now, with all these 'granteds' are you and Pierce to live absolutely and entirely alone, isolated, self-contained, shut up and out from all intercourse of any kind with any being in the world?

"If not, there's Hodge, and Molly, his wife, in the next cottage—painfully near to yours, as you are made aware, when he beats her occasionally. Now Hodge is a most estimable ploughman—does not beat his wife except when he is drunk, and does not get drunk nearly so often as many of his friends. Molly, also, is a valuable member of society, and probably

does better for her husband, in the main, than you can do for Pierce, because she was a scullery-maid before she was Mrs. Hodge, and is therefore, to the 'manner born,' of rough scrubbery, and cheap cookery; but Hodge has not many ideas beyond 'turmuts and varmint, and skittles and beer,' and his smock frock and boots do not exactly suggest 'Araby the Blest.' He has the unfortunate habit of chewing tobacco, and its consequences; also of scratching his head energetically; and a too copious use of his clasp knife as a tooth pick; these little defects of manners do not make him a peculiarly agreeable companion for your husband; whilst Molly, perhaps, is hardly the person whom you would choose as a bosom friend. She would be advantaged by a more frequent use of the bath, with a *soupçon* of eau de Cologne afterward. Somebody's dentrifice, would render her

chaste and neighbourly salute less objectionable, and a certain moderation in the use of onions would be an improvement. She will be an invaluable adviser as to the best combinations of bacon-fat and "taters" to produce what she may possibly call a 'summut stowin' (whatever that may mean), and as she will have a fixed idea from your 'fine-lady ways' that you'll soon leave your 'master' and get a place in a grand house, she will be eloquent and confidential as to the best and most approved methods of making up 'bags' for the 'shop,' and increasing the natural proportions of kitchen-stuff.

"Now, I fear such conversation, and such associates would hardly be congenial after your homely, but still, to some extent, ladylike training here. So shall we look next at the same little farce enacted amidst life in London?"

"Your country picture, papa, leaves something to be desired, certainly; so if you are not tired I should like to see what we might do in town."

"Well, then, in town, dear child, Pierce would not risk breaking his back or getting rheumatism by the use of the spade in all weathers; but there would be the Charybdis to that Scylla, for he might split his brain with his pen almost as easily as split his pen with his knife. You would not have to do any scrubbing, because experience would show you that, in the grim presence of London dirt, such a proceeding was simply hopeless. You would not have pigs and ducks, but their absence would be amply atoned for by rats and mice in more than satisfactory profusion. Cooking might be dispensed with, whilst you had either money or credit at the nearest cook-shop, and the

tally man and potboy would supply the remainder of your modest requirements. Possibly you might sacrifice to gentility by keeping a draggle-tail girl who, when she hadn't run round the corner on some mysterious errand, would save you the ignominy of running down three pair of stairs in obedience to the three knocks that signalled your altitude.

"You would have this further advantage, that you might be as genteelly shabby or as shabbily genteel as you chose without any one taking the slightest notice of you.

"Then, for society? Oh yes, within certain limits you could have a large range of society. A broken-down coal merchant, with a bad cough, would probably live in the next room; a supernumerary of the Surrey 'Theayter' in the attic above; congenial situation! for is he not, in imagination, still in

the 'flies,' even during his short repose? His daughter, a distinguished member of the *corps-de-ballet* in the same aristocratic theatre, would probably be a little too *prononcé* in her manners to be altogether delightful, and you might occasionally wish that her fairy-like movements overhead, when madly practising some new *pas-seul*, were as light to listen to as to look at; but the real aristocracy of your small and happy community would be the occupants of the first floor; a fast, gaudily-dressed, sporting lawyer's clerk, with a dashy flashy lady who, by courtesy, passes as his wife. Even here, however, you may perceive that life has nothing altogether perfect, since your legal friend, notwithstanding his slight connexion with an honourable profession, is in reality a more intolerable, because a more obtrusive, vulgarian than poor Hodge; whilst his 'good lady' indulges somewhat too

freely in coarse spirits and still coarser language, and occasionally takes her 'fling' with a 'reel,' more suggestive of Irish whiskey than the Scotch dance."

"But, papa, can these horrible pictures be true?"

"True, my girlie? They are so true, that if it were desirable I could take you, tomorrow, through scores upon scores of streets and houses where these, and far worse things than these, were being daily and nightly enacted."

"No," said Caroline, with a feeling of heart sickness in her tone, "I fear I could not endure such a life."

"No, my dear, I do not think upon calm reflection that either of these forms of independent poverty would be quite suitable to you. If you had been born and bred in them they would have been no more distasteful to

you than they are to those who live those lives."

"But can any live such lives without distaste, disgust, and utter misery, dear Geoffrey?" said Lady Langdale.

"Assuredly! In the wildest Bohemian life, to those who know no other, there are coarse, wild pleasures, fierce excitements, a stir, a passion in them which compensates in large measure for much of their external and apparent discomfort; and recollect what seems to you so intolerable, is wholly unnoticed, or accepted as the most natural thing in the world, by your born Bohemian. You, delicately born and bred ladies, waste a great deal of pity (that might find better objects) on these rough lives; imagining yourselves, as you are at this moment, suddenly plunged into such a state. You ask, with a most pitiful horror, how can

any one endure such a state of existence? How terrible! How awful! Poor, poor 'things!' meantime the 'poor, poor things' are getting considerably more animal and more energetic enjoyment out of their rough lives than many of the languid fine ladies who pity them. Conceive what a feast, bringing with it keener relish than the daintiest banquet, can be made out of a savoury sausage and a 'baked tater,' or a slice of ham, penn'orths of butter and hot rolls! What ambrosia of the gods could equal the pot of porter to thirsty lips? What nectar could rival a glass of Old Tom? Then, after drinking delight with these, can they not also 'drink delight of battle with their peers;' and as a sequent enjoyment, of a lesser, but more domestic nature, can they not beat their wives to their hearts' content?"

"To whose hearts' content, Sir Geoffrey?"

"Well, to the husbands', perhaps, chiefly; but it seems to content the wives also, if we may judge from our experience on the bench?"

"But now, dear husband," said Lady Langdale, naturally desiring to change the subject, "if Caroline will take our advice, and not decide too hastily, I think it would be a very good arrangement for you to take both the girls a long and pleasant journey, so that Carrie may have something to divert her thoughts from this subject."

"And leave you at home, meantime?" enquired Sir Geoffrey.

"Why not? You and I have travelled so often together, and seen almost all that is worth seeing; and it would be so delightful to me to think that the dear girls were having some of the same pleasures."

"Oh! selfish unselfishness!" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey. "In your morbid desire for

self-sacrifice, you do not consider that you are involving me also; and as my heroism does not run in that direction, I must make it a condition of taking them, that I take you, too."

"They will not enjoy it so much as if they have you all to themselves; besides, I am not strong enough to travel long distances, or climb mountains with them, and so shall be a hindrance to you all."

"The pleasure of travelling is not measured by miles, and the summit of a mountain is not necessarily the summit of enjoyment; therefore, lady-mine, you must go with us. We will drive, and take as easy stages as you please, and in any direction you like. What say you, Carrie? I'm sure you are too sensible a girl to mope, because the world *is the world*, with trials in store for young people, as well as old."

"No, dear papa; I will be as cheerful as

I can, and shall be indeed glad to get away, both from the scenes which vainly recall Pierce, and painfully contain Mr. Fallington."

Thus it was promptly arranged that a route should be sketched, and all prepared for a long and vagrant journey through England and Wales to the lakes, and, perhaps, afterwards to Scotland; for the Langdales knew well that nothing would be so likely to change the heady current of first love, as new scenes and a rapid succession of new faces and events.

Meantime, Pierce Falconer had ridden down whilst the proposal in his letter was being discussed, and was now received by Sir Geoffrey to hear the fateful answer.

Who can well describe the tormenting alternation of ecstatic hopes and miserable fears during that morning ride? and what horse, or mare, of the very highest in-

telligence could possibly understand the reason of the wild abruptness with which its rider first urged it into a swinging gallop, and then pulled it up to a funeral walk; as hope or fear, in turn, assumed the reins.

As Pierce dashed past the library window, he marked the rapid flash of a white dress hurrying from the room, and in a few moments afterwards he passed through the corridor and across the hall into that same room, to find Sir Geoffrey alone.

A wistful glance into the recesses went forth, but came back with its craving unsatisfied. Sir Geoffrey's part in this painful interview was for the time, almost more trying than Pierce's.

The necessity for saying what he felt compelled to say, placed him at war with himself; his generous, impetuous nature

warring violently against the prudential motives which forbade all present acceptance of the proposals, and which would have made it a most cruel kindness to hold out much hope for the future.

Of course he touched very lightly and delicately on the arguments that led to this decision; rather indeed, giving slight suggestions of the picture, which Pierce, in his pride and sensitiveness, rapidly, if perhaps a little bitterly, filled in. Hence the poor young fellow instead of pleading all the eloquent counter-reasons, which are so convincing until shattered against the hard rock of circumstance, gradually turned king's evidence against himself, and prepared his own death warrant.

The only point on which Sir Geoffrey touched with some pressure, was the possibility of making his daughter a sufficient

allowance to support them both; but Pierce fired up at the meanness of supposing any man of spirit could be dependent on his wife or his wife's relations, and as this was the sole alternative, he was self-answered.

The young people were allowed to see each other once more, with the tacit understanding that it was to be the last time for an indefinite period.

Knowledge, conviction, right-reason of the highest order—can these control the feelings and shape the actions into such complete uniformity to the judgment as to exclude all rash utterances of mutual vows, all wild projects for evading the inevitable? Certainly not with the impulsive nature of woman; for despite all, when it came to the shock of absolute parting, poor Caroline, forgetting everything for the moment but love and gratitude, offered in words, broken

with tears, to sacrifice everything rather than not repay him with the life he had saved; with these words came the climax of Pierce's trial. The father's refusal, or rather indefinite postponement, of his suit, had been nothing compared to this. But to see her he so loved in overwhelming grief, to hear those loving utterances, and to feel madly in love in return, was a strain almost beyond mortal endurance.

A mist came before his eyes, broken by a sudden flash, and then a blank darkness, in which he felt he could have plunged, with Caroline in his arms, down into the deepest gulf that poet ever fabled; aye, down for ever, down to blackest Acheron or fiery Hades. But his better angel prevailed, and once more opened his eyes, ere too late, to the clear, cold, searching light of reality.

With a deep-drawn sigh, he shook off the

spell of the momentary mad impulse, and, taking both her hands, gazed long and sadly into her eyes; then said, slowly and with great effort—

"Dearest and noblest, I must not, I dare not, let you do yourself such wrong. Better that I had not been near to save your life, than that I should now mar it; better, aye a thousand times better, to have dragged you down into the depths of that lake, than into the far more terrible, because living, death of misery."

"But could not I share it, and lighten it for you, Pierce?"

"No, love; you would share it, indeed, but at the same time double it. Its weight would crush us both."

"Then what remains?"

"Only hope! Ah! only hope!"

There is a light graceful form fallen in

abandoned grief on a couch. There is a crash of hoofs on the courtyard outside, and the flash of a horseman past the hated library window; and the gypsy mare has told Pierce Falconer's fortune.

END OF VOL. I.

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